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January 11, 2012

# THE Christian CENTURY

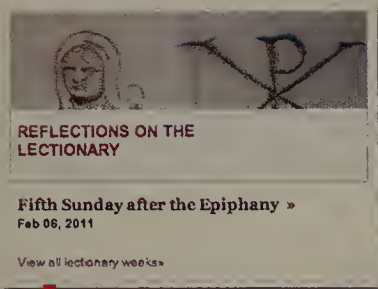
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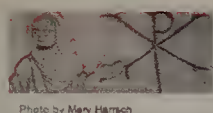
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## Current week



### Reflections on the Lectionary

Lectionary-related content sorted by week

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE LECTIONARY

Feb 06, 2011  
Fifth Sunday after the  
Epiphany »

Feb 13, 2011  
Sixth Sunday after the  
Epiphany »

Feb 20, 2011  
Seventh Sunday after  
the Epiphany »

Feb 27, 2011  
Eighth Sunday after the  
Epiphany »

More reflections »

#### REFLECTIONS FOR Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany »

Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112:1-9 (10); 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16); Matthew 5:13-20

Feb 06, 2011

#### BLOGGING TOWARD SUNDAY Coming in weakness »

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Jan 31, 2011 by Scott D. Anderson

For the past 20 years I have toiled in the vineyards of two state legislatures: in California for 12 years and now in Wisconsin for the past eight, along with occasional forays to the U.S. Congress. In these arenas I have represented the interests of state councils of churches, which are really the interests of those who don't have the time, money or wherewithal to advocate for themselves: children, impoverished families, working-class parents with low-paying jobs.

LIVING BY THE WORD  
Sunday, February 6, 2011 »  
1 Corinthians 2:1-16

3 comments

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- For upcoming weeks, see the links on the left. Or click "More reflections" to browse the whole cycle by season or year.

You'll have access to everything in our online archives that treats that week's lectionary readings.

## All weeks

### All Lectionary Weeks

Lectionary-related content sorted by week

FILTER BY SEASON

Lent

FILTER BY YEAR

Year A

Go

LENT

Ash Wednesday »

Mar 08, 2011

Year A

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

LENT

First Sunday in Lent »

Mar 13, 2011

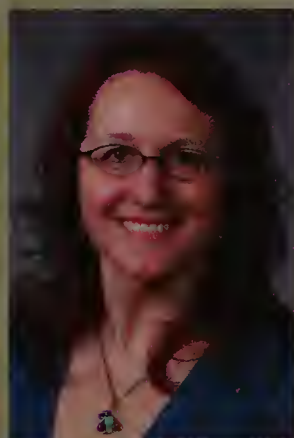
Year A

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

LENT

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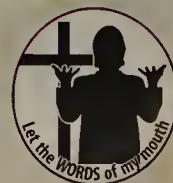
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# LETTERS

## Secular and sacred

**J**ohn Buchanan states that “incarnation means that God is with us in this world, the sacred in the secular, the holy in the profane” (“A this-worldly story,” Dec. 13). It is poppycock theology. Why would you even attempt to differentiate these contrived terms? Sacred and secular! Holy and profane!

A decade ago, I heard Princeton Theological Seminary professor Diogenes Allen lecture on the sacred and secular for an hour. Afterward I got up and said to him, “Where I come from, we do not attempt to distinguish the sacred from the secular as they are a continuum, like day and night.” Allen commented to the audience of 200-plus pastors, “Why didn’t you tell us about that an hour ago? We could all have gone shopping.”

*John T. Mathew*  
Canfield, Ont.

**J**ohn Buchanan points out the dissonance between our belief in the incarnation and our wholesale bemoaning of the way that the “secular” gets mixed up with the Christmas celebration. His comment brings to mind an event from years ago.

A few families, including more than one clergyperson, had gathered in one family’s home for a Christmas Eve celebration of the Eucharist. During the liturgy of the word, which took place in the living room, one member of the group offered a brief homily, the gist of which was that the incarnation does not oppose what is secular but sacralizes it.

When it came time to move into the dining room for the Eucharist, someone said, “Let’s sing as we go.” “Sing what?” came the question. One of the younger folk present suggested “Jingle Bells,” which was met with a chorus of adult groans. Whereupon one of the homilist’s



teenagers said, “Wasn’t anybody listening to Daddy?”

*Arnold W. Hearn*  
Mountain View, Ark.

### *Rembrandt and closure . . .*

**I**n his beautifully written article “Faces of Jesus: Rembrandt and the incarnation” (Dec. 13), Martin Copenhaver notes that Rembrandt’s Jesus is “obviously human,” unlike the Christ usually portrayed in Western art until that time. Indeed, Rembrandt’s painterly chiaroscuro took Jesus down from the altar to the place which pierces the heart.

My father, who was a painter and sculptor, taught me to draw basic shapes when I was small child. The thing to remember, he said, is the principle of closure. You don’t have to draw a line around the whole circle; just draw enough to engage the viewer—then the viewer finishes the drawing.

I have been blessed to be able to view many of Rembrandt’s paintings, and I have seen that principle of closure at work. His early works are flamboyant

and effortless. But he was visited with much sorrow, and his paintings somehow assume the role of recording a life that moved back and forth between light and shadow. The brushstrokes became fewer and broader. While no less precise, they invite us closer and closer into his paintings, to take part in his journey and to finish the forms with him. So his sketches, studies and self-portraits are the works we treasure most. Through them we accompany a confident and self-assured young man through pain and sorrow and finally to a quiet peace and acceptance.

*Vanessa Jean Falgoust*  
Danville, Va.

### *Remembering the departed . . .*

**L**ucy Bregman’s article (“Speaking to Mourners,” Nov. 1) makes me want to read her book. She helpfully identifies some of the sources of trends and changes in the approach to funeral sermons in the past century. In addition, she is appropriately critical of some practices that fail to balance theological integrity with pastoral compassion.

I would go further than she does in describing the role of remembering the departed as part of the funeral sermon, which she urges as a means to “convey Christian caring and respect for the departed.” In my opinion, the goal of remembering the departed involves more than caring and respect; it is an attempt to name and describe the places where the story of this individual intersects with the greater story of what God has done, is doing and will do in the world. In short, it is an attempt to give an account of this person’s life that places it in some kind of theological context. This is often quite difficult to do, and I sometimes fail, but it is still the goal which directs my striving.

*James Benedict*  
Union Bridge, Md.



January 11, 2012

## Pathway to citizenship

Newt Gingrich's call for a more humane policy toward undocumented immigrants produced the usual reaction from other Republican presidential candidates: they accused him of advocating "amnesty." The former House Speaker had observed, "If you've been here 25 years and you got three kids and two grandkids, you've been paying taxes and obeying the law, you belong to a local church, I don't think we're going to separate you from your family, uproot you forcefully and kick you out."

Gingrich injected a smidgen of reality into the conversation. Most leaders in his party talk as though the 10 million undocumented immigrants in this country snuck across the border last night and should be—could be—rounded up and deported. Such a deportation policy, even if it were remotely feasible, would be inhumane and devastating to families throughout the country.

Whether he knew it or not, Gingrich was describing a great many adult immigrants. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, a nonpartisan research organization, 35 percent of immigrants have been in the U.S. 15 years or more, and another 28 percent have been here at least ten years. About half are parents of children under 18 years of age. And 39 percent attend church weekly. In sketching a portrait of an undocumented immigrant as family-loving, hard-working, tax-paying, churchgoing and deeply rooted in the U.S., Gingrich was pretty much sketching the typical immigrant.

As Gingrich suggests, it's absurd not to offer such a person a pathway to legal status. Perhaps the worst element of the broken immigration system is that it offers no reasonable way for that tax-paying, hardworking immigrant to become a citizen. The only application process available requires the immigrant to leave the U.S.—uproot his family or leave his family behind—and return to his home country, apply for U. S. citizenship, and then wait on average ten years for a decision. That's no option at all—and it's certainly not a policy that cares about families.

Gingrich's remarks hardly constitute a workable plan for immigration reform, however. To begin with, why pick 25 years as the magic number? (If you've been here 24 years, you'll be deported?) Furthermore, he proposes holding indi-

vidual hearings for the 10 million illegal immigrants, with local panels—on the model of local draft boards—making the decision on residency status. That's a recipe for massive injustice, not to mention a logistical nightmare. Perhaps worst of all, Gingrich posits giving undocumented immigrants legal residency but not citizenship, a policy that would create something the U.S. has never had—a permanent class of guest workers who play a major role in society but lack the right to vote.

Perhaps in calling for a more humane immigration policy, Gingrich was merely indulging in his famous penchant for tossing out off-the-cuff ideas. That his remarks advanced the discussion is a measure of how empty the rhetoric has been.

**It's absurd not to offer hardworking, longtime immigrants a pathway to legal status.**

# CENTURY marks

**COURAGE TO BE:** Bonnie Ware has long worked in palliative care, spending time with the dying during the final weeks of their lives. Over the years she's heard the same regrets from the dying. They wish they had had the courage to be themselves, rather than trying to meet expectations. They say they should not have worked so hard—a lament heard especially from the older generation of males. They regret not having had the courage to express their feelings, even if doing so would have caused others pain. They say they should have stayed in touch with their friends and given more time to nurturing friendships (Activist Post, November 30).

**FOLLY OF WAR:** In 2010, Bob Woodward interviewed President Obama as part of his research for the book *Obama's Wars*. As the president ushered Woodward out of the Oval

Office at the end of the interview, Woodward showed him a quotation from a book on World War II. The quotation said that war is corrupting and that it tarnishes the soul and the spirit. Obama said, "I have sympathies with this point of view." Then he told Woodward to go home and read his Nobel Peace Prize speech. Woodward took the president's suggestion. In that speech President Obama concluded that though "war is sometimes necessary . . . war at some level is an expression of human folly" (Woodward, *Obama's Wars*).

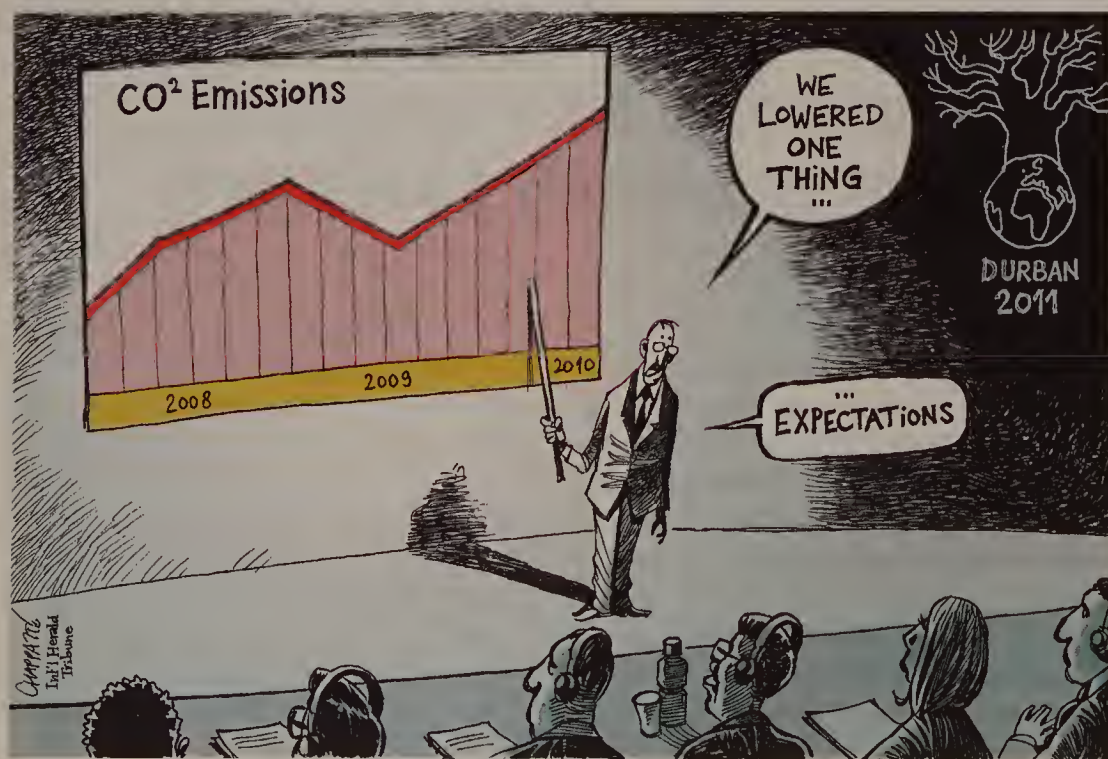
**FROM THE GROUND UP:** Christians typically think of humans as stewards of creation, says Theodore Hiebert, an Old Testament professor. That view, based on the Genesis 1 account of creation, needs to be counterbalanced by the Genesis 2 account of creation. In the latter account, humans aren't portrayed

as stewards over creation, but as an integral part of and servants of nature. In the second account, humans aren't created in the image of God as the crowning achievement of creation; rather, they are formed out of the fertile earth just like other forms of life. This vision of creation emphasizes human interrelatedness with nature and the need to serve it, rather than using it to serve human needs (*Interpretation*, October).

## A HITCH IN THE REVIEW:

Christopher Hitchens thought ethics was a matter of action, not intention. To illustrate his point he told how he had had a chance to review a book by an author who had given one of Hitchens's own works a bad review. It was a wonderful opportunity for revenge, but Hitchens realized the book he was reviewing was brilliant and he had to say so. His only obligation was to the truth. Hitchens, author of *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, died last month at age 62 of esophageal cancer (*Chicago Tribune*, December 17).

**SKEPTICS IN THE PEW:** Nearly one out of five scientists who claim to be atheists or agnostics go to church at least some of the time, according to a study done at Rice University. The scientists don't do it for themselves but rather for their children. They want them to be exposed to the morality taught by churches, and they want their children to decide matters of faith for themselves. Most of these nonbelieving scientists come from families who were not deeply involved in religion, and they became involved only when they had children of their own (ABC News, December 7).





**HOST CITY:** The tenth assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2013 will take place in the city of Busan at the southeast end of the Korean Peninsula. Known as a center for Buddhism, the city offered shelter for those resisting communists during the Korean War. It is a place marked by schism among Presbyterians. One split resulted from the Korean Presbyterian church's allowing Shinto shrine worship during the Japanese occupation. A second schism resulted from disagreement over participation in the WCC. While less than 10 percent of Busan is Christian, it holds special meaning for Korean Christians: Christian missionaries to Korea first arrived there, and a great awakening in Korea started there. Ji-il Tark, professor at Busan Presbyterian University, notes that, ironically, hosting this worldwide ecumenical assembly is creating ecumenical tensions in Busan (*Theology Today*, October).

**AID FOR THE RICH:** More than 20 percent of U.S. financial aid for college goes to students who don't need it, according to the College Board, the association of colleges that administers the SAT test. Colleges and universities are using this money to compete for students with high grade point averages and SAT scores. Elite schools like Harvard, Yale and Stanford give aid to students from families with incomes as high as \$200,000. The consequence is that fewer dollars are available for students with actual financial need, whose share of financial aid has steadily declined over the past decade (*USA Today*, November 25-27).

### GOOD PAY FOR HISTORIAN:

Jonathan Zimmerman says the first thing he learned in graduate school about being a historian is that the field demands both rigor and humility: you must know what you're talking about—and when you don't, you need to admit it. These are not qualities that characterize Newt Gingrich, who has been leading in the polls as candidate for the Republican presidential campaign. Gingrich has a doctorate in history, but he never did the academic work necessary for gaining tenure at West Georgia College, where he taught before launch-

**“I am an anti-Zionist. I'm one of those people of Jewish descent who believes that Zionism would be a mistake even if there were no Palestinians.”**

— Writer Christopher Hitchens, outspoken in his stance against both Israel and religion. Hitchens died last month of cancer (*Christian Science Monitor*, December 16).

**“Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”**

— Poet, playwright Vaclav Havel, who led the nonviolent revolution in the former Czechoslovakia and became its first president. He died last month at age 75.

ing a political career. Gingrich has written over 20 books that use history, but most historians regard them as simplistic and partisan. He defends the work he did for Freddie Mac by saying that he was a historical consultant, for which some sources say he earned as much as \$1.8 million. “Who knew my profession could be so lucrative?” asks Zimmerman (*Chicago Tribune*, December 1).

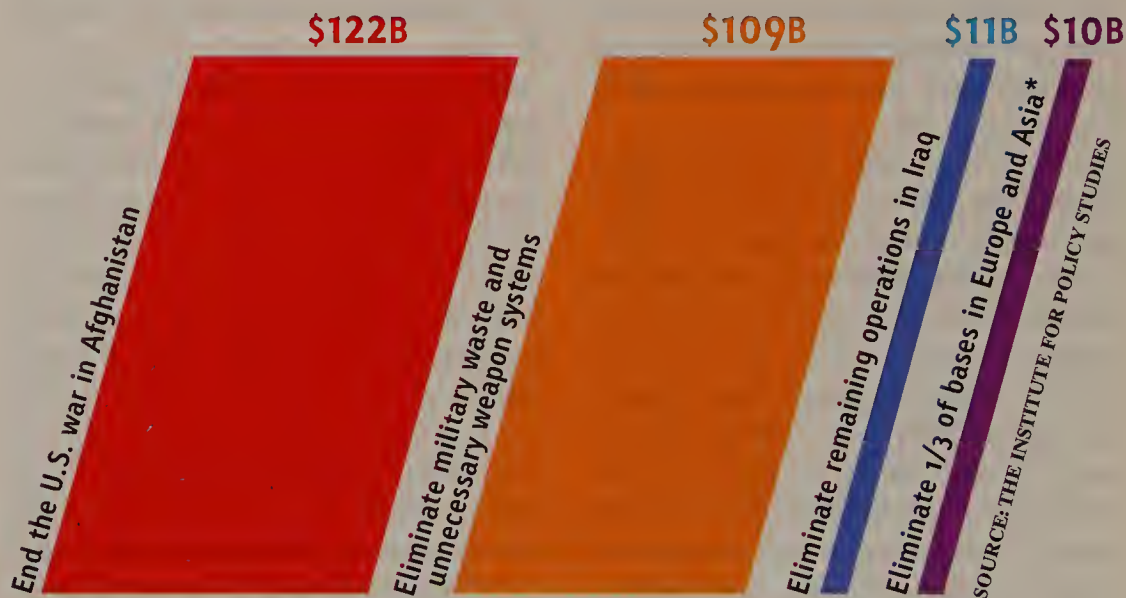
### DOES GOD (PARTICLE) EXIST?

Scientists at the Geneva-based European Organization for Nuclear Research believe they are honing in on the so-called

God particle, also known as the Higgs boson. Scientists hypothesize that this particle is what allows other particles to have mass. Researchers at the institute, known as CERN, are using the 27-kilometer Large Hadron Collider to try to create the conditions that existed after the Big Bang that formed the universe 13.7 billion years ago. Alternative explanations for the mechanism that allows particles to have mass are also being pursued. Scientists working on the Higgs boson say they'll search for another year. If it is not found by then, they will conclude that it doesn't exist (*Washington Post*, December 13).

## MILITARY DIET

The Institute for Policy Studies is suggesting a way to save **\$252 billion** each year in the federal budget by cutting defense spending.



\*IPS suggests this as the first step toward eliminating all foreign military bases.



# Table manners

by Andrew Packman

COMMUNION IS a vital part of my week. My tradition, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has staked its identity on the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Each week we celebrate an open table: anyone who wishes to follow Christ is invited to receive the bread and the cup.

This is not the practice, of course, in the Catholic mass. There, only Catholics are welcome. And while I disagree with these rules, I respect them—so I abstain.

But I don't sit passively alone during communion at a mass. In the face of the Catholic Church's theological claim, I like to make a counterclaim of my own. I go forward, and when I reach the priest I cross my arms over my chest. This is the official signal that I am either a Catholic in need of confession or not Catholic. Instead of the body and blood of Christ, I get the door prize: a sign of the cross and a blessing.

My gesture usually catches the priest off guard. It makes me uncomfortable, too. Typically our eyes meet, a moment of indecision passes, confusion results, and I stutter-step my way down the line sans bread and wine. For me it's a little Protestant protest, a small interruption in the normal flow of "the body of Christ, the blood of Christ." In that moment, the priest and I are both confronted with my exclusion, with the fact that in this church, I am a second-class Christian.

Last summer, however, I toned down my quietly radical ways. I spent the summer in Bosnia, studying religion and reconciliation in the Balkans as part of my divinity school education. I went to the region to make observations, not waves. When I found myself in a Catholic

church on Sunday morning, I was content to restrict my eucharistic protest to silent prayer.

My studies took me to the broad Austro-Hungarian boulevards of Belgrade. I was invited by a Sarajevo-based interfaith choir—made up of Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim and atheist singers—named Pontanima to travel to the Serbian capital to witness the reconciling potential of religious music. One stop on the itinerary was to lead worship at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church.

As the mass crescendoed toward its eucharistic climax, the choir filled the sanctuary with a wide array of dynamic

head to pray my little prayer of Protestant protest.

When I lifted my eyes, I saw a portly man in a white robe scurrying down the side aisle. His eyes sought me out with an innocent and quizzical look, like a little boy searching for his parents in a crowd. His glasses bobbed down his short, round nose as he raced down the aisle—too quickly for a priest, too quickly for 60-year-old man.

The whole scene was awkward. With 20 or so people still in line to receive the Eucharist, this Bosnian Franciscan took a handful of the host and sought me out of the crowd. Nearly out of breath, he

## The God who shows up at communion seeks us out of the crowd.

Orthodox chants and sublime Catholic hymns.

But as beautiful as this harmonic symbol of unity was, it proved to be fleeting. Once the conductor's baton brought the music to a halt, we were back to business as usual.

The priest consecrated the host, and some folks rose to receive the bread and the cup. Those of us who weren't invited remained in our pews. Catholic was divided from non-Catholic, insider from outsider. Religion's power to harmonize and unite lasted as long as Pontanima could hold the low drones of Rachmaninoff's bass line; its capacity to divide and exclude was never far away.

Disappointed by this reminder of religion's ambiguity, I watched the line form in the center of the sanctuary. I pressed my knees to the side to let my Catholic neighbors pass by me, and I lowered my

lifted the small plate toward me. I stood up from my pew.

"Will you have communion?" My heart beat faster, the way it does if you get asked to speak when you're not expecting it, or when you're breaking a rule and know you may get caught.

I muttered, "Yes, I will."

"Christ's body, broken for you." He placed the host in my hand. I raised it to my lips and carefully set it down on my tongue. It stuck to the roof of my mouth and began to dissolve, flesh to flesh. As the priest returned to the rest of his flock, I felt the emotion welling up from my gut into my throat and reaching up toward my eyes. My head fell again in prayer—not of protest this time, but of gratitude.

---


*Andrew Packman is a student at the University of Chicago Divinity School.*



I imagine this is what the prodigal son felt when he watched his aged father risk looking like a fool as he sprinted out to meet his son. Priests don't run during the mass; they certainly don't leave the 99 sheep behind to seek out the one who's lost, the one who needs to feel the warm embrace of full inclusion in a Christian community.

Phrases like "radical welcome" and "Christian hospitality" are popular these days; back home in Chicago it seems that I hear them in church almost weekly. They can become routine, milquetoast clichés that don't mean much. But in a world marked by violent ethnic strife, cantankerous political divisions and toxic racial segregation, the Lord's

Supper has the potential to be a powerful and hopeful alternative.

My "first communion" reminded me that the God who shows up at communion is a God who brazenly—even foolishly—seeks us out of the crowd. A God who awkwardly crosses divisions and differences to invite each of us to full participation in life with God. 

## Remembering all the victims of war

# Prayer concern

by Marilyn McEntyre

**IN THE CHURCH** I attend, populated largely by people who might describe themselves as left-leaning and politically aware, the prayers have for months included a prayer for the families of American soldiers who died that week. The names of the soldiers are read with appropriate, sometimes moving, solemnity. Inevitably those names trigger empathetic thoughts: "David—that's my brother's name." "I wonder if Kathryn's parents called her Katie." "William has the same last name as my college roommate."

As the names are read I try to imagine each of them and their sorrowing families, holding them in that moment of spoken prayer as brothers and sisters whose sufferings touch us all.

But I have wrestled with those prayers. Some Sundays I have found it hard to maintain an attitude of prayer. I am bothered by the way the singling out of our war dead seems to valorize a military project I believe to be unwarranted, excessively costly and riddled with profiteering covered by propaganda that keeps us paying for it. I do think that most of those who died in these wars, however righteous their intentions and courageous their actions, died in vain—a

thought that laces my sorrow with bitterness.

Moreover, I have found myself increasingly troubled by the fact that those prayers for the men and women who serve in the U.S. military did not include the family of the unarmed Afghan child who was shot in cold blood when he approached American soldiers. Or the nine-year-old Iraqi boy who was killed in his garden trying escape a raid on his house. Or those who died fighting American troops: surely even if they are our "enemies," the command that we love them must extend to mourning their deaths and their families' losses.

I finally asked one of the liturgists whether we might include some mention of those whom Americans had killed that week. It was, of course, a blunt way of putting the request; distress had driven me to impatience. I somewhat gratified when the next week (and thereafter) the prayers for the families of soldiers were followed by a prayer for comfort for "all who are victims of violence in war zones."

The circle of concern could, of course, go on expanding to the point of vitiating the energy and imagination one hopes to bring to prayer. Why not, after all, pray as well for all who are suffering from

domestic abuse? Or from grueling poverty or joblessness? Or starvation due to political gridlock? Why not name all the forms of suffering and loss flesh is heir to or that greed and lust for power create?

Because, of course, there is not world enough and time. And because we do, perhaps rightly, tend to mourn our own dead first, however we define "us." But not to acknowledge our shared culpability as citizens of a nation that has done violence to the defenseless by policies and trade agreements as well as by missiles and M-16s is to participate in the hypocrisies that perpetuate that violence. They, too, are ours to mourn.

**T**hose who mourn are blessed, Jesus mysteriously proclaimed. He may simply have been stating a fact. But this Beatitude may also be an invitation to deepen our understanding of how mourning may bless us—perhaps because it takes imagination and a very open heart to enter into others' sorrow,

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to mourn truly and generously not only those whose absence puts a sword through our hearts every waking day but those who lie in unmarked graves, whose names we don't know. Mourning, like any other good thing, can be contaminated by self-concern. Hopkins's poem that begins with the question "Margaret, are you grieving . . .?" ends with the edgy observation, "It is Margaret you mourn for"—not an accusation, but a recognition that our mourning brings with it renewed awareness of our own mortality.

One way to mourn authentically the dead whom we may have come to regard as enemies or aliens or anonymous others is to connect the dots that trace a path between us and them—the policies, the expropriation of resources, the forms of protectionism and attitudes of American exceptionalism that need to be renounced in order to recognize that the earth was their home as it is ours.

Last September, during a presentation on the causes, unanswered questions, and

highly orchestrated aftermath of 9/11, a speaker at the Toronto Hearings showed a picture of a blood-spattered five-year-old Iraqi child standing in the middle of a room, wailing over the body of her father who had been shot by Americans. In fact, her whole family had been gunned down in front of her. Whether such pictures should be in the news is a matter of legitimate controversy; Susan Sontag thoughtfully raised the question in *Regarding the Pain of Others* whether images of others' suffering may not too often numb and distance us rather than awaken empathy—especially if they are mass-produced for casual perusal over morning coffee. Still, we seem to need help imagining the sufferings we help cause.

I say "we" not because most of us would willingly or explicitly consent to such indiscriminate violence if we had to make a personal, close-range decision about whether to engage in it, but because most of us implicitly consent to its being done in our name. Living in a

nation that wields more power than any other ever has obliges us, I think, to learn to mourn more widely and complexly, if our mourning is to be "blessed." Our laments for our own losses need to be accompanied by confession of our complicity in others'. Our sorrow needs to be deepened by allowing ourselves to experience appropriate horror at the atrocities we countenance. Only when we grieve for those we have killed as well as for those we love who have been killed will we be able to enter into the mourning that links us to all humans who live with the aching agony of loss.

I don't know to what degree such mourning is even psychologically possible. Certainly my own is mired in a messy mix of sorrow, shame and frustration at Americans' lack of political will to stop the killing. But I want to learn, among those with whom I pray, how to mourn in a way that may be blessed. The courage to do that may open our hearts in a way that enables us to be comforted. **CC**

## Jeremiah's vexing task

# A weary prophet

by Frank G. Honeycutt

*"Under the weight of your hand I sat alone." (Jer. 15:17)*

**WHEN THE YELLOW** buses roll each fall, I remember my elementary schoolteachers and say a prayer of thanksgiving, recalling each name and face. Mildred Chaffin, my fifth-grade teacher at Elbert S. Long School in Chattanooga, was a major player in shaping my early perceptions of God. You did not fool around in Mrs. Chaffin's class. You did not laugh or ever horse around, and even on the playground only guardedly so. It took only a direct gaze

from her to address any hint of disorder or rebellion—a gaze I was certain could crack granite. We sat in robotic rows and hardly ever moved from fear of her, sharpening pencils and moving through the lunch line in timed precision like a small platoon of marines. I would rather have wet my pants than ask to go to the bathroom at an unscheduled time. (Woe to the poor child who accidentally passed gas during geography.)

I came to associate Mrs. Chaffin with God, who could somehow see and know everything even when facing the blackboard. This was 1967, and she preached

in class occasionally, using the Bible to undergird her convictions. Once Mrs. Chaffin asked me to serve as class monitor, which was supposed to be something of an honor, but your friends hated you for it. You sat up front at the teacher's desk and took names. "I'll be down the hall for just a minute," said God, "and I know you'll be very good boys and girls, especially since Frank is in charge"—the little snitch.

I still wonder about a boy named Kenny. I wonder if he's in prison. Kenny phoned in a false bomb threat when we were in junior high. All the boys (how



gender-biased was that?) were paraded into the gym. Policemen wanted a confession from somebody. They led Kenny away.

During my half-hour tenure as hired informant for God, Kenny ran to the blackboard and with manic glee repeatedly spelled a variety of four-letter words, even the shocking ones, erasing them with each daring gallop. It's hard for a class monitor to ignore this.

God returned to class soon enough. She knew something was up. All eyes rested on me, and then on Kenny, who was rather large for a fifth grader, and back again to me. I still sometimes wake up in the middle of the night, sweating from this memory.

**T**he thing about serving as a prophet is that you are forever stuck between what God wants and what the people want. It's a rather tiring vocation. I'm not sure anybody ever really volunteers for the job. Take Jeremiah, for instance. God says in chapter one of the book bearing his name: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born . . . I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (1:5).

Well that sounds special, like something you might find on a Hallmark card, but here's my take on God's gestational action with Jeremiah. Perhaps he called the old boy to be a prophet when he did because a baby cannot object. "Go, young Jeremiah, and say things to wayward adults that will get them hopping mad." You've got to hand it to God. A small child who cannot even talk will have a hard time questioning this commission.

Jeremiah did not have an easy life in trying to be faithful to God. I suppose that's true for any of us, but Jeremiah had a particularly tough time of it because God said something like, "OK, class, I'm going to be down the hall and away from you for just a little while. I've appointed Jeremiah to serve as class monitor, and he'll be my ears and eyes and mouth."

Many people ran back and forth to the blackboard, so to speak, during the prophet's tenure, and he had to take names. People got mad, threw him in stocks, tossed him into a cistern with three feet of mud in the bottom, called

him names and smacked him around. Jeremiah was even instructed by the Lord to remove his underwear, bury it near a rock by a river, then dig it up and wear it as a symbol of the unfaithfulness of the people—they weren't clinging closely enough to God as good underwear should. Thank God Mrs. Chaffin did not ask me to do this!

It was no kind of life, this prophet's life. So even though Jeremiah could not talk back to God in the womb, in chapter 15 we find that the old boy has had enough of the prophetic life. Jeremiah gives it to God with both barrels. He asks God to smite his opponents. He blames God for his sufferings. He recalls the past delight in the relationship, which is no longer delightful. He complains about his isolation, citing his complete lack of a social life. (I can't imagine the prophet ever attending anything resembling a wild party, but Jeremiah reminds God he's

## It is God's mercy that drives the prophetic vocation.

never once had fun because of this ridiculous calling.) At prayer's end, he bluntly describes God as a dry creek bed. There is no amen at the end of this prayer, which suggests that Jeremiah has more to say but won't say it.

Years ago my wife and I were hiking the Appalachian Trail in Pennsylvania. It was a very hot and dry summer. We were each down to a single swallow of water. The guidebook assured us that a spring was just ahead on a side trail. I took our water bottles and climbed down a very steep trail, one-quarter mile, to the spring. It was dry—bone dry. "You, God, are like that useless spring," prayed Jeremiah. "Dry, untrustworthy."

This is quite a prayer. I'm pretty sure that if somebody burst into our quiet, controlled liturgies and prayed this prayer with prophetic vehemence and unbridled despair and volume, we might ask an usher to call the police. But God listens to the one whom he has called from the womb. God allows Jeremiah to vent about the vexing parts of Jeremiah's job. God surely knows exactly how hard it is to be a prophet.

But God also speaks, and Jeremiah receives a direct answer from God concerning his complaints. You might expect a bit of patience and understanding from God—maybe a moment of hand-holding or six weeks of therapy on someone's couch for the tired prophet. But there is none of this.


"Look, mister," God seems to say, "if you turn back from this nonsense you're mouthing, I'll take you back. I know these people. They're going to fight against you, but they won't prevail over you, for I am with you to save and deliver you."

God needs the prophet. The prophet is downhearted, but God needs the prophet to speak. The prophet is worn out, but God needs the prophet to speak to ungrateful people. The prophet needs a reminder.

In *The Enigma of Anger: Essays on a Sometimes Deadly Sin*, Garret Keizer

gets to the heart of Jeremiah's weariness: "The thing that makes us the most angry with God, more angry than droughts and famines, male pattern baldness and cellulite, is God's mercy."

It is the mercy of God, the love of God for his people, that has driven the prophetic vocation in any century. We need prophets. We need people who tell us what we don't want to hear. God sends them back in there. Let's pray for the Jeremiahs, for those who stand between God and his people.

I am no prophet. I'm a weary pastor who knows that Kenny still lurks in the pew, waiting to accost me at the church door or in a board meeting. Perhaps Jeremiah's old and honest prayer will temper my vocational timidity and give me the courage to name what needs naming around this school that is church. 

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## Mainline moves to trim bureaucracy

A list of the Episcopal Church's 75 commissions, committees, agencies and boards spilled over eight PowerPoint slides during a recent presentation by its new chief operating officer, Bishop Stacy Sauls. By his count, there are also nearly 50 departments and offices in the church's New York headquarters and 46 committees in its legislative body, the General Convention.

Sauls, hired by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori in May, said that he has since learned there are even more offices "that I had never heard of before."

"It has become just Byzantine," he said. "The governance structures have grown by accretion, without any strategic plan." Nearly half of the denomination's budget is spent on overhead, according to Sauls.

Meanwhile, Episcopal membership continues to drop, dipping below 2 million in the U.S. for the first time in decades. Donations, too, are down. It is time for change, starting at the top, Sauls said.

"We've been operating in a system where certain expertise resides at the churchwide level and pronouncements get sent down the pipeline," he said. "That model is last century. It's a radically different time now."

Mainline Protestants' national offices spread their reach into every field, from liturgy to gender equality to disaster relief. But as they seek to halt decades-long declines, a number of denominations are trimming their branches and tending to their roots: local congregations. Many are moving to decentralize power, shifting resources and responsibilities from national headquarters and elected

churchwide assemblies to regional bodies and local leaders.

"There used to be a mentality of: as goes the national office, so goes the denomination," said David Roozen, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut.

Church leaders "are finally getting the idea that the future of their denominations are tied to the vitality of their congregations," said Roozen, coeditor of the 2005 book *Church, Identity and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times*.

But the moves have prompted protests from some longtime members who worry that lay voices will be muted and long traditions of democratic deci-

sion making will be jettisoned in favor of expediency. Roozen said mainline Protestants lag behind secular companies and entrepreneurial evangelicals in trading top-heavy bureaucracies for flat and fluid networks.

Recently, though, they have been catching up:

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approved a plan in August that prioritizes congregational growth and moves its Churchwide Assemblies from every two years to every three.

- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) enacted a less regulatory and more flexible form of government in July.

- The United Church of Christ voted overwhelmingly at its General Synod in July to form a 52-member board to succeed five existing boards that have a total of 300 members. A similar, preliminary proposal failed in 2009, but UCC leaders are optimistic that by June its 38 regional conferences will provide the two-thirds margin to ratify the unified governance plan.

- In the Episcopal Church, a proposal authored by Sauls and approved so far by 17 dioceses would appoint a special commission to study restructuring. The proposal will be debated at the 2012 General Convention. Sauls has also suggested that the triennial conventions are too expensive and should meet less often.

- Leaders in the United Methodist Church are pushing a major restructuring plan that would consolidate ten churchwide agencies into five. The agencies would be run by a 15-member board of directors, itself overseen by a 45-member advisory panel.

United Methodist Bishop John Hopkins, who chairs a panel advocating change, said the denomination's 13



**VOICING CONCERN:** *Bonnie Anderson, president of the Episcopal Church's House of Deputies, fears that a plan to downsize the church's internal bureaucracy and streamline operations will mute the voice of the laity.*



agencies, publishing house and pension board collectively have 550 board members who meet just a few times each year. That's a recipe for stagnation, he said.

The proposed changes would streamline the denomination and make it more responsive to local congregations, some of which view the national agencies as out of touch, according to Hopkins. "We've got to flatten the church a little bit to make sure this perceived distance is reduced," Hopkins said.

The UMC's Council of Bishops overwhelmingly approved the plan and voted to redirect \$60 million in church funds to develop young leaders and congregations. The bishops, however, do not have a vote at the 2012 General Conference, where the restructuring will be debated. And some United Methodists are already lining up in opposition.

In a joint statement, leaders of five racial and ethnic groups called the plan "oligarchic" and said it "will exclude the participation of racial/ethnic persons." In addition, the Methodist Federation for Social Action is pushing an alternative plan that would create four ministry "centers," each with its own 33-member board. "Our process will be more inclusive of folks who are not white," said Tracy Merrick, the MFSA's national treasurer.

The Episcopal plan also has its critics. Bonnie Anderson, president of the House of Deputies and the church's top lay leader, accused Sauls of mounting an "end run" around a committee that had already been studying restructuring.

Anderson also doubted the need for a special commission to restructure the church. The House of Deputies and the House of Bishops have already demonstrated the ability to make major decisions—to allow gay bishops, for example—at recent General Conventions, according to Anderson. "To think that we couldn't decide ways to restructure the church is a bit naive," she said.

At the same time, Anderson agrees that the Episcopal Church needs to change. "I believe that we need more resources and authority at the local level," she said. "The days of the big corporate front office, if not gone already, are dwindling pretty fast." —Daniel Burke, RNS

## Public image worries SBC, pleases United Methodists

by John Dart

News Editor

A task force that studied whether the nationwide Southern Baptist Convention should drop its regional name tag may have encouraged advocates for change after its own polling agency showed high negative responses to "Southern Baptist." Proponents for a change have reacted with reserve. The SBC annual meetings or top officials have rejected moves to rename the convention eight times since 1965.

Task force chairman Jimmy Draper said in a statement December 7 that its recommendations, which were not made public, will "greatly strengthen our ability to reach more people with the gospel." The report goes before the Nashville-based SBC Executive Committee in February.

The SBC LifeWay Research study contained mixed news. About 53 percent of Americans had a favorable impression of Southern Baptists, but 40 percent had an unfavorable view. More than a third of respondents said an SBC church "was not for them."

Half of young adults between 18 and 29 said they would react negatively if they were told a church they were thinking of attending was Southern Baptist. Of adults with a college degree, in the same hypothetical situation, 52 percent said it would impact them negatively, according to the study.

"The negative impact numbers concern me most," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. "Knowing a church is SBC would make four out of ten Americans less likely to visit and join—and many of those are unchurched."

Meanwhile, Methodist communications officials, also based in Nashville, took heart from the LifeWay findings. About 62 percent of U.S. adults had favorable views of United Methodists, which barely topped the 59 percent favorable impressions made by Catholics.

The United Methodists received the lowest unfavorable rating—23 percent—of five religious groups.

By comparison to the three Christian groups, Mormons and Muslims had the least favorable views (37 percent and 29 percent respectively). The online survey, taken in September, had responses from more than 2,000 adults.

The United Methodist Church, the second largest Protestant denomination, has seen a steady drop in U.S. membership for 50 years, but the nation's largest Protestant denomination, the SBC, has experienced a decline in baptisms and other growth measurements mostly in the past decade.

Because the UMC has a gradually aging clergy and membership, church leaders have sought to attract young adults. But the survey showed that of the five religious groups in the study, adults aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 49, are more likely (20 percent) to have a "somewhat unfavorable" opinion than those 50 years and older (13 percent).

The Methodists' communications arm began an advertising campaign in 2001 with the slogan "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors" to increase awareness of the denomination's basic beliefs. That campaign evolved in 2009 into another one called "Rethink Church," aimed at 18- to 34-year-olds and emphasizing service opportunities, from advancing literacy to feeding the poor.

Larry Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications, said the LifeWay findings underscore the need to persuade audiences that faith can be relevant to their lives. "We have found that connecting seekers with the church through mission and outreach opportunities can have profound effects," he told United Methodist News Service.

Hollon cited two examples: One was a recent social service event in El Paso, Texas, at which 82 percent of the volunteers were not part of the local church and 40 percent were in the 18-to-34 group. Another was in Topeka, Kansas, where a project sponsored by 20 Methodist churches drew nearly 1,000 volunteers for outdoor cleanup work, of which 200 had no church links.



## U.S., Cuban church leaders seek normalized relations

Church leaders from ecumenical councils in the U.S. and Cuba wrapped up a five-day meeting in Havana on December 2 with a call for “normalized relations” between the two countries. A joint statement said that the long U.S. embargo against Cuba and “a half century of animosity between our countries” must end.

The 16-member National Council of Churches delegation and leaders of the Council of Churches of Cuba noted that their meeting grew out of strengthened ties formed when Cuban church representatives took part in the NCC’s 2010 General Assembly.

The church leaders thanked the Obama administration for lifting some restrictions on travel to Cuba last January but called for the “speedy and complete fulfillment” of the president’s public intention “to review and revise long-standing U.S. policy toward Cuba.”

Michael Kinnamon, the outgoing NCC general secretary, said in a sermon November 27 at the National Episcopal Cathedral that besides the blockade, two other issues hang over Cuban-U.S. relations. One is the U.S. imprisonment in 1998 of the Cuban Five, five Cuban intelligence officers, which some U.S. churches and Amnesty International have condemned.

The other issue is the Cuban incarceration nearly two years ago of U.S. citizen Alan Gross, who brought restricted communications equipment into the island country to aid Internet access for a small Jewish community. Kinnamon visited Gross in jail before he and others in the NCC delegation met with Cuban President Raul Castro.

Kinnamon said he and Castro discussed possible “small steps” to be taken, such as cooperation on drug and human trafficking in the Caribbean and improved air traffic control with updated equipment. The chances for such cooperation “are complicated in an election year,” he said at a packed press conference in Havana, “but I am a person of faith so I always live in hope.”

Cuba will have another religious visitor in March. Pope Benedict XVI confirmed on December 12 that he will travel to Cuba and Mexico next year. Press reports said the two-country visit will begin March 23.

Benedict said he hoped his trip would contribute to the construction of a society “rooted in the development of the common good, the triumph of love and the spread of justice.”

After a historic visit by the late Pope John Paul II in 1998, relations between the Vatican and Cuba have improved in recent years. In 2011, church officials helped secure the release of 115 political prisoners who left Cuba to go into exile in Spain.

The Vatican ambassador to Cuba, Giovanni Angelo Becciu, a key figure in Vatican dialogue with the Castro regime, was promoted last May to the no. 2 position in the Vatican’s secretariat of state. —RNS, other sources

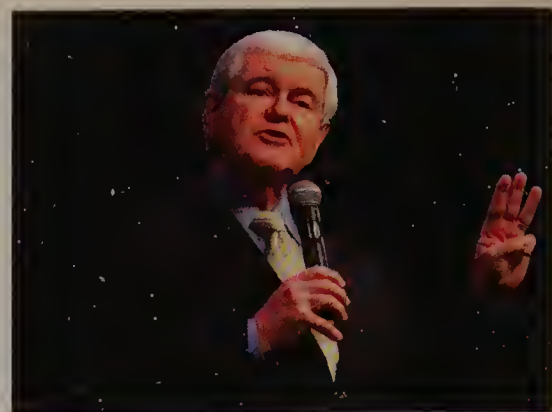
## Gingrich’s rhetoric stirs GOP’s Jewish activists

GOP presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich ignited an audience of Republican Jewish activists in Washington by promising to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. And he was just getting started.

Gingrich also promised to use American dollars to fund “every dissident group” in Iran, whose leader has threatened to destroy Israel. And he would appoint John Bolton—former U.S. ambassador to the UN and a conservative favorite—to head the State Department.

With his fiery pro-Israel rhetoric, Gingrich outdid Mitt Romney’s speech to the same group earlier in the December 7 meeting. All GOP presidential candidates except Rep. Ron Paul (R., Tex.) spoke to the gathering of the Republican Jewish Coalition, and all expressed strong support for the Jewish state.

Romney, often accused of blandness, had tried to inject some passion into his remarks and even received a few compliments from audience members for his energetic defense of the U.S.-Israel partnership.



**FRONT-RUNNER:** *Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has been gaining ground among crucial evangelical voters in the Republican primary race, despite his three marriages.*

But Gingrich, who was gaining significant ground on Romney, seemed to tap directly into the audience’s frustrations with what they perceive as a U.S. foreign policy that is unduly patient with those who would do Israel harm.

“Can you imagine if our next-door neighbor were firing missiles at us and we said ‘Oh, can we come to the table?’ How about saying to Hamas: ‘Give up violence and come to the table?’” Gingrich said, referring to the militant government that rules the Gaza Strip. “It’s always Israel’s fault no matter how bad the other side is, and it’s got to stop,” Gingrich added.

Doug Hutt, a Jewish Republican who came to the Washington forum from East Brunswick, New Jersey, called Gingrich’s comments—particularly his promise to move the embassy to the ancient capital of Israel—“a lot of red meat for the crowd.” (Past peace proposals have tried to divide control of Jerusalem between Israelis and Palestinians.)

Hutt added that he and other Jewish Republicans still wonder if Gingrich, who carries significant baggage related to his businesses and past marriages, is electable.

Jewish Democrats said Jewish voters will overwhelmingly support President Obama, as they did when a solid 78 percent of U.S. Jews cast their ballot for him in 2008.

David A. Harris, president of the National Jewish Democratic Council, called the December 7 meeting “the rarest of audiences—a group that is 100 percent Republican and Jewish.” —Lauren Markoe, RNS



## Can there be too much 'Tebowing'?

Thanks to Denver Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow, sports and religion have become the topic du jour. Arguments over Tebow's path to the Hall of Fame can be waged, but it's clear that his name is a rarity: the proper noun (Tebow) can be used as a verb (Tebowing—or getting down on one knee to pray).

"Tim is who he is," said Brent High, the associate athletic director for spiritual formation at Lipscomb University, who saw an event sell out when Tebow was a guest speaker there. "If you are a Christian, he is your absolute flag-bearer in the sports world. You cheer for him and you hurt for him when he takes the beating that he takes."

But High added: "If I am putting myself in the shoes of someone who is offended . . . and Tebow is getting down on one knee with all cameras trained on him, that's in my face. . . . So I can see why it's like the fingernails on the chalkboard to those people."

Tebow's actions aren't new; athletes have been thanking God longer than they have been thanking mom, and many fans have pledged loyalty to a higher being in exchange for a touchdown, a first down or a fumble.

"We've had athletes being very vocal about their faith and using their status as athletes to promote their faith for a long time now," said Tom Krattenmaker, author of *Onward Christian Athletes: Turning Ballparks into Pulpits and Players into Preachers*. "But Tebow seems to have taken it to an extra level of intensity."

So why is a quarterback who has started a dozen games in his professional career the dividing line in the debate over religion and sports?

"People have a sense that he is shoving religion down our throats," said Patton Dodd, managing editor at Patheos, a website that is dedicated to religion and spirituality, and author of *The Tebow Mystique*. Dodd, who believes that "it is a little bit unfair" to criticize Tebow, says there is now "a piety about his piety."

Not all religion and sports connections are controversial. Brent High used to

work for the Nashville Sounds, a minor league baseball team, and was a cocreator of Faith Nights at minor league baseball parks. Those at the ballpark who were not interested in faith, he said, probably didn't notice anything beyond "a memo on the video board in the fourth inning."

High added an important note: God sells. A Faith Day event, which often features a postgame Christian concert, could mean between \$250,000 and \$500,000 to the bottom line, he said.

"Christians are a huge demographic," High said. "Eighty-eight percent of people in America will identify themselves as some type of Christian. If you are sitting in an executive seat for the Colorado Rockies or St. Louis Rams or a hockey team, you would be foolish not to pay attention to that demographic the same way you pay attention to real estate agents, schools and scouts."

But it was not that 88 percent that former Broncos quarterback Jake Plummer had in mind when he said of Tebow: "When he accepts the fact that we know that he loves Jesus Christ, then I think I'll like him a little bit better."

Tebow had an answer for Plummer: "Is it good enough to only say to your wife I love her the day you get married? Or should you tell her every single day when you wake up and every opportunity?"

There is no debate that Tebow, the son of evangelical missionaries, is passionate about his beliefs. Krattenmaker and Dodd point to the "John 3:16" eye black that Tebow wore when he was the star quarterback at the University of Florida as the tipping point in his expression of faith.

"Athletes had been wearing their faith on their sleeve, quote, unquote," Krattenmaker said, "but he's a guy who had it right on his face."

In the end perhaps it comes down less to whether Tebow is "the guy" and more to the fact that Tebow is "their guy."

"At times, if you are an evangelical Christian, it feels like the faith is being beat up on and marginalized," said Krattenmaker. "To see someone like Tebow to come along—that boosts them all and makes them feel kind of proud. He is a real champion for the faith and makes them want to defend him." —Reid Cherner, USA Today

## Climate talks offer no help to poor nations

United Nations climate talks achieved minimal success in late 2011, say Christian leaders and activists, agreeing with environmentalists and other experts who claim the outcome at Durban, South Africa, did too little to respond to the impact of climate change on poor countries.

The 17th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed to retain the Kyoto Protocol—though Canada withdrew from it—and start negotiations in 2015 for a new legally binding deal to take effect in 2020. A fund for climate aid to poor countries was also agreed upon at the conference, which ran November 29 to December 9.

"We need to listen to vulnerable countries and populations, and think of the legacy we are leaving to our children. Churches should continue to act and pray," said Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, in a December 13 statement.

According to observers from faith groups, climate change has severely affected African countries, Pacific Island states and South American and Asian peoples despite the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted eight years ago to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Religious leaders say the problem should be addressed as a moral, ethical and spiritual issue.

In Nairobi, Jesse Mugambi, a professor of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Nairobi who attended the talks, cautiously welcomed the outcome, but observed that developed nations were not keen to commit to a binding agreement for cutting the emissions.

"It appears, for the poor and powerless, it is between them and their God. They should not count on the rich nations to help them. Justice and equity have been left out for profits," said Mugambi in a telephone interview.

"In 2020, it will be 50 years since the first conference was held in Stockholm. Regional leaders will have abdicated their responsibility [over rescuing the planet] to the next generation by then, and that is unethical." —ENInews





**SHEDDING SHIRTS:** Sharon Cool picks up a free Cardinals T-shirt with Albert Pujols's name and number on the back at a store in Chesterfield, Missouri. The shirts were given away after Pujols signed with the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim for a long-term, \$254 million contract. The Gathering United Methodist Church in St. Louis collected the shirts for charity. "We heard people were burning their Pujols jerseys," said pastor Matt Miofsky, who noted that the church planned to donate them to charities in the Anaheim area. "It's a great way to put a positive spin on something that's been very painful for all of us," said church member Elaine Kidwell, a lifelong Cardinal fan.

## Russian Orthodox join election fraud protests

After a week of mounting protest over alleged fraud in Russia's parliamentary election, the Russian Orthodox Church has called for stricter control over the election process—evidence of the extent to which anger has spread in Russian society.

A demonstration in Moscow December 10 drew 25,000 people, police said, but opposition leaders said the numbers were at least 80,000. Smaller protests were held across Russia. The voice of the church could play a significant role as activists plan for demonstrations on successive Saturdays.

"I think that the situation that has taken shape must stir the authorities and various social forces to begin a national dialogue

on the format of the electoral process and civic control over it," Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, the Moscow Patriarchate's most prominent spokesman, told Pravmir, a widely cited Orthodox news site, after the demonstration.

Russia's Central Election Commission is often seen as allied with the Kremlin. Demonstrators have been calling for the resignation of commission chairman Vladimir Churov.

Chaplin told the Interfax news agency that the church was pleased that the demonstrations were peaceful. His statement came after days of strikingly frank statements by individual clergy about possible election fraud.

"That priests are ready to speak out openly about this, and speak of this with anger . . . and speak of the possibility of public protest . . . several weeks ago, even several days ago, it would have been impossible to imagine," Sergei Chaplin,

editor of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, said in an interview.

During the election campaign, Aleksei Pluzhnikov, a priest in Volgograd, wrote that he had been called in on three hours' notice by the local district government office, arriving to find a roomful of priests. They were addressed by a bureaucrat telling them to encourage parishioners to vote for United Russia, the party led by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The *Volgograd Times* reported that priests were among demonstrators in Volgograd. —Sophia Kishkovsky, ENInews

## Humanitarian concerns stall cluster bomb accord

Religious leaders and disarmament campaigners hailed the decision in Geneva by 50 countries to derail a proposal backed by the United States, Russia, China, India and Israel to create a new global accord on cluster bombs, contending that it did not meet humanitarian concerns.

The proposal, put forth during the Fourth Review Conference of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), which ended November 25, called for the destruction of all cluster munitions produced before 1980. However, it would have allowed the use of munitions with a failure rate of 1 percent or less, as well as those with only one safeguard mechanism.

"The bottom line is the use of these weapons would have continued in some form, and we look to the day when these weapons are banned," said Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's permanent representative to the UN.

A cluster bomb releases smaller bomb-lets designed to kill enemy personnel and damage vehicles and enemy munitions. The Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions, enacted in 2010 and ratified by 111 countries, imposed a comprehensive ban on cluster bombs and mandated the destruction of existing stockpiles.

Despite changes introduced by the U.S. in the last hour of the two-week conference, representatives from many countries said the draft proposal did not



“address fundamental human concerns,” in addition to allowing for continued production and use of cluster munitions.

“It is so important that we take all necessary measures to eliminate these weapons; this is of great responsibility for any humanitarian organization. This is the way we express our love by taking care of our neighbor,” said Tony D’Costa, general secretary of Pax Christi Ireland.

“The bar set by the Oslo Convention is really high, and we have to continue to persuade other countries to come up to that level, including the big powers,” said D’Costa. The five countries that supported the failed CCW proposal have not signed the Oslo Convention.

Steffen Kongstad, Norway’s representative at the conference and one of the original architects of the Oslo Convention, said asking other parties in the CCW to endorse continued use of weapons that were well documented to have serious and unacceptable humanitarian consequences “was a bit too much.” —John Zarocostas, ENInews

## George Harrison as theological rock star

As the lead guitarist of the world’s pre-eminent rock band and a prolific song writer, the Beatles’ George Harrison has secured his place in pop culture history. But his greatest legacy may be the way his decades-long spiritual quest shaped the ways the West looks at God, gurus and life.

Harrison, who died of cancer in 2001 at age 58, was an intensely private global superstar. He’s now in the spotlight again, thanks to a coffee-table book by his widow, Olivia, and a new Martin Scorsese documentary on HBO.

Both projects are subtitled *Living in the Material World*, a Hindu-inspired phrase Harrison chose for a 1973 song that illuminates his theology and sense of artistic vocation: “Got a lot of work to do / Try to get a message through / And get back out of this material world.”

Harrison discovered Eastern religion through his love for Eastern music, which was sparked when the Byrds’ David Crosby and Roger McGuinn introduced



**SPIRITUALITY SEEKER:** Beatles guitarist and songwriter George Harrison is the subject of *Living in the Material World*, a new HBO documentary and coffee-table book that explore his attraction to Eastern spirituality.

him to the work of Ravi Shankar, the renowned sitar musician who would become a lifelong friend and mentor. Harrison added sitar lines to the Beatles’ 1965 hit “Norwegian Wood.” When he traveled to Bombay the next year to study with Shankar, he was moved by the Indian people’s spirituality.

“The difference over here is that their religion is every second and every minute of their lives,” said Harrison, who like Paul McCartney was raised in Liverpool’s Roman Catholic community.

Harrison previously had sought insight through marijuana (introduced to the Beatles by Bob Dylan) and LSD. “It was fantastic,” he once said of drug use. “I felt in love, not with anything or anybody in particular, but with everything.”

Drugs, however, weren’t enough. “LSD isn’t a real answer,” he said. In 1968, Harrison led the Beatles and their celebrity friends on a pilgrimage to Rishikesh, India, to study Transcendental Meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The Maharishi, like other savvy Eastern gurus, used endorsements from rock stars to market himself to spiritual seekers in the West, many of whom embraced the Beatles as seers and oracles.

Most of the time, though, Harrison let his music do the talking. His dreamy, sitar-drenched “Within You Without You” opened side two of 1967’s classic *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. The song contrasted Western individualism with Eastern monism: “And the time will come when you see

we’re all one / and life flows on within you and without you.”

“I Me Mine,” the final song recorded by the bickering Beatles, attacked “the ego, the eternal problem.” After the Fab Four folded, Harrison’s solo career blossomed. *All Things Must Pass*, his 1970 solo album, was a three-LP box set that *Rolling Stone* magazine called “the *War and Peace* of rock and roll.” The chorus of “My Sweet Lord,” a no. 1 single, alternated chants of “Hallelujah” and “Hare Krishna.”

Thirty-one years and 13 albums later, Harrison’s last recorded song was the title cut of his posthumous 2002 release, *Brainwashed*. The song catalogs humanity’s spiritual crisis, pleads for divine deliverance, repeats “God” 48 times in the choruses and closes with Harrison and his son Dhani chanting a Hindu hymn.

“George was making spiritually awake music,” said filmmaker Scorsese. “We all heard and felt it, and I think that was the reason that he came to occupy a very special place in our lives.” Harrison’s beliefs were as complex as his song structures.

He could be preachy, pedantic and dismissive about problems in the “material” world, but he also organized the superstar Concert for Bangladesh in 1971, raising \$10 million for victims of human and natural tragedies.

A cafeteria Hindu, Harrison’s songs drew inspiration from everything from Ram Dass’s best-selling memoir (“Be Here Now”) to the Tao Te Ching (“The Inner Light”) to Paramahansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi* (“Dear One”).

“Harrison exemplified consumerist religion,” said Dale Allison, author of *The Love There That’s Sleeping: The Art and Spirituality of George Harrison*. “He was curious and read a lot, and he liked to try out things that he read.”

Harrison was perhaps the most explicitly and consistently theological rock star of the last half-century. He nudged his bandmates—and his listener fans—a bit further to the East, encouraging audiences to open themselves to new (or very old) spiritual influences. Or, as his widow, Olivia, puts it, he “transcended the distractions of success and fame to maintain a one-pointed focus upon his goal of spiritual awakening.” —Steve Rabey, RNS



# LIVING BY The Word

*Sunday, January 15*

*1 Samuel 3:1–10, (11–20); John 1:43–51*

**SOME YEARS AGO**, when I was in my first pastoral appointment, I met an 11-year-old named Victor at youth court. A friend had asked me to serve as translator for Victor's father, who spoke only Spanish, because Victor was about to be tried for shooting a child in the leg with a BB gun. Violence and trouble were part of life in Victor's neighborhood. In the Gospel of John, when Nathanael asks Philip if anything good can come out of Nazareth, he might have been talking about Victor's neighborhood or about kids like Victor.

After the jury had deliberated, Victor was given the maximum punishment of 25 hours of community service plus four jury duties at youth court. As I explained the verdict to his father, I realized that the family lived only blocks from the church I served in the urban core of our Midwestern city. It was decided that Victor would begin his community service hours at our church the next day.

His first task was to help clean up an unused youth room on the third floor. It was hot, dusty and messy up there—not a particularly congenial setting for someone trying to maintain moussed, spiked hair. But Victor took the task seriously and assured me he could make a difference in the room. If he did, I told him, the room could become a youth room for him and his friends.

It didn't take Victor long to turn that musty room around. At one point he came across a large cross that he placed on a table so that the two objects resembled an altar. He then positioned the entire apparatus—altar and all—in front of the east window. He told me that he had considered many places for the cross, but this seemed to be the most fitting. "This is a church, isn't it? Every church should have a cross in the window so those of us on the outside can see it."

Victor had one more responsibility during those weeks. We needed help with vacation Bible school. Victor wasn't sure about doing any kind of "school" in the summer, but he said he'd help. When he invited his friends, our VBS was blessed by Javier, Pedro and Fernando.

We are told in 1 Samuel, "The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." I often feel as though all my years in ministry have been spent in times when the word of the Lord was rare and visions not widespread. I imagine a time when the Lord's voice might be clear and ever present. I pray for visions that draw a picture of what the future of our congregation, community and city will look like. Must the

voice of the Lord feel so distant? Must we wait like Samuel, so attentive to the needs and voices of others that we begin to mistake the Lord's voice for yet another demand on our time, energy and resources?

The request to go to youth court came only weeks after I'd begun my first full-time appointment in a parish. I was so neck deep in the "stuff" of ministry that I was hesitant to provide this translation favor for a friend. Did I really have time to assist a kid accused of shooting another kid with a BB gun? Every parishioner was waiting for a home visit; the music director was asking for Sunday's scriptures; the district needed members for a task force on urban ministry. Then came the call to help Victor. I have been called once already, I thought. Please, everyone, stop calling me!

These days our congregations struggle to make sense of the way cultural change has pummeled our identity. Pastors seek refuge from the voices crying out for their attention, few of which resemble the voice of God. Like Samuel, we continue to get up and tend those who are crying out in need.

Then Samuel receives a word from his wise mentor, Eli. "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'"

Eli sensed what was coming over Samuel. Even though the word of the Lord was rare in those days too, and visions were not widespread, Eli counseled Samuel to go, wait and prepare for God's voice.

During the week of vacation Bible school with Victor assisting me and his friends participating, his buddy Pedro came to me with a question: "Pastor, you know those community service hours that Victor has? How can I get some of those?"

I was stunned to attention. All of the other voices crying out for attention stopped. I was silent. Then I listened. The voice of the Lord was about to speak a new vision. It was clear and came with a challenge: Do kids have to shoot someone with a BB gun before they are invited into your church?

From that day on, Victor and his friends guided our Wednesday afternoon youth ministry on the third floor of that church in a once dusty, messy room. The cross stayed in the east window, but more and more young people began to see it from inside rather than from the outside. Victor and his friends respectfully demanded access to a building they thought had been closed to them, a space where the word of the Lord was rare and visions not widespread—until their voices cried out.

Later Jesus would say to Nathanael and his doubts, "You will see greater things than these." Indeed we will.



# Reflections on the lectionary

**Sunday, January 22**

**Jonah 3:1–5, 10; Mark 1:14–20**

**DURING BIBLE STUDY** one day, a lifelong member of our congregation shared a story from his boyhood. William had grown up just north of downtown Miami and was a teenager when he began taking the bus down to the church with his brother to attend Thursday's children's choir rehearsal. Soon he began to notice others who were riding with him. When he hopped on the bus downtown and began to journey north back home, female domestic workers and male day laborers would begin to fill the bus. He noticed that many of these women and men had to stand during the entire ride because they were people of color and therefore restricted to the rear of the bus, where all of the seats were quickly taken.

Troubled by the situation, William decided to do something. Although he was white and could sit at the front, he decided that he would go to the back of the bus and take one of the seats in the section reserved for people of color. When there were no more seats in that section, William would stand and give his to the next woman of color who got on the bus.

Many years later this man is a leader in nurturing a racially and economically diverse congregation. I believe he must have been paying attention in Sunday school when he heard stories like the one in Mark in which Jesus calls the disciples. "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." Where did they go? To places like the rear of the bus.

We read the gospel stories describing the call of the disciples and wonder many things: Did it really happen this quickly? Were the fishermen that taken with Jesus, or were they so dissatisfied with fishing that they left in a rush to follow? Did neither father nor mother make a fuss about their departure?

Perhaps these questions come from our own experiences of discipleship. We often drag our feet, weigh pros and cons and consider the implications for family and other commitments. Then there are our nets—they're so full of things we find difficult to leave behind that we attempt to take them along, sure that we'll need some of that old baggage on our new journey with Jesus.

But we're told that Simon and Andrew *immediately* left their nets and followed. If only we could respond so quickly.

Perhaps the story of Jonah more closely resembles our own journeys. The Lord cries out and we flee. We try to escape the demands of discipleship that challenge us to name injustice

and call for repentance. Like Jonah, we run from the city or workplace or political structure that is precisely where God is calling us to be and work. Like Jonah, we discover that we cannot escape the presence of God or of God's call on our lives. If we discern well, in spite of the detours along the way, we return as Jonah did to God's original vision for us and see God's faithfulness at work.

The congregation I serve recently celebrated 115 years of ministry. For many years there were two Methodist congregations just blocks apart in downtown Miami, a northern and a southern church. Even after those divisions were finally dissolved in 1939, both congregations continued to exist separately, with only occasional talk about merging. Then in 1965, a 14-year-old who had escaped from reform school in New York set fire to the sanctuary of one of the churches. The fire happened on a Saturday night, and on Sunday morning the pastor scribbled a big sign on what remained of the front door, "Burned out but fired up! Service as usual." That morning the two congregations worshiped together in the undamaged building.

Here's where William comes in. No one is surprised that the young man who gave up his seat on the bus would become

## How were the disciples so ready to leave their nets?

instrumental in the merger of these two congregations with vastly different identities. The new congregation would become multiracial and known for its ministries with the homeless. It would remain in the city when other churches had left. Leaders like William would draw strength from the stories echoing through their lives: stories of detours through the mouths of big fish and of disciples dropping nets to follow. The words of Jesus continue to ring true, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

If we pay attention to the details of our scriptural heritage, we'll learn how to shape our lives. We'll see Jonah rushing away from the Lord to Tarshish. We'll read again about those disciples who jumped up and followed Jesus. Yes, we are still both the follower who drags her feet and the young man or the congregation that is "fired up" about what God has in store. But in the midst of challenge and opportunity, we dare to discern well and trust in God's faithfulness.

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*The author is Cynthia D. Weems, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Miami, Florida.*

# Peer power

by Christina Braudaway-Bauman

WHEN I CALLED a group of pastors to ask if they wanted to join a clergy peer group, they were understandably a bit skeptical at first. They didn't need one more meeting to attend. And they had already participated in other kinds of clergy groups—regional gatherings hosted by the denomination and meetings of the local clergy association—which, to be honest, were not all that satisfying.

At most clergy gatherings, when pastors report on their ministries, they only skim the surface and they tend to paint a rosy picture, especially if a denominational executive is present who has influence on pastoral placement. Some personal sharing might go on, but it usually revolves around complaints about workload, the stresses of ministry, the state of the church or the dysfunction of the denomination.

If some brave soul is vulnerable and speaks honestly about the challenges of ministry, the other pastors inevitably rush in to offer advice and recommend a solution. The minister who made himself vulnerable leaves feeling sorry to have dropped his guard. Pastors come away from such gatherings feeling vaguely dissatisfied and cynical, disturbed by how oddly competitive and condescending the meetings are and disappointed that in one way or another they had again missed a chance to offer one another support in ministry.

Privately, the ministers still wonder if other pastors have an easier time in ministry than they do, and they wonder how others approach their tasks. And they realize that, in spite of all the meetings they attend, they sometimes feel lonely in ministry.

In my conversations with these pastors, I stressed my hope that this peer group would be different, designed to help them figure out what they themselves needed for them to be sustained and renewed in ministry and how they could engage in conversation with colleagues in more authentic and meaningful ways. The focus would be on “pastoral excellence.” That phrase was intriguing to them. These pastors worked hard and cared about bringing their best efforts. Though they sometimes felt daunted by the difficulties of ministry, they were also proud of what they had accomplished with their congregations. *Excellence* was not a term they usually used in thinking about themselves, but they thought that excellence was something that the people in the pews deserved and something that God deserved. The idea of talking with others about excellence in ministry was energizing—this didn't sound like one more conversation about what is wrong with the church.

Something else would be different about these clergy meetings: they would be organized and led by a trained group facilitator who was herself a respected pastor. The agenda for the group would be open, decided by the members of the groups themselves, but the meetings would not simply be a series of random discussions.

So a peer group was started. The first meeting was devoted to letting participants share at length how they had come to

“I need a safe place where I can admit what I don't know,” one pastor said.

ministry and where their journeys in ministry had taken them. They talked about their hopes for the group and what each of them needed for this group to be helpful to them.

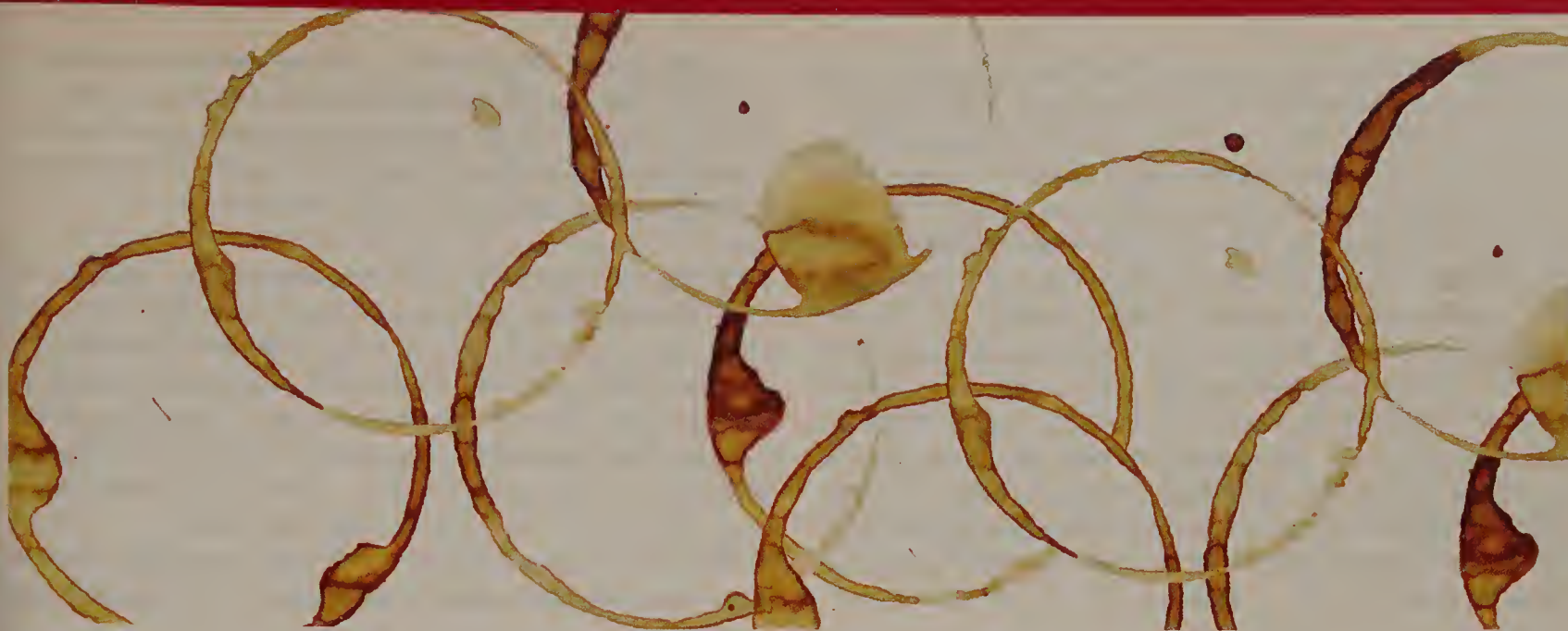
They decided to meet on a monthly basis, and they agreed to make attendance a priority, recognizing that the group would be diminished if anyone missed a meeting. A time to check in with one another in each meeting, they decided, was essential. They also noted that the sharing needed to be honest and real—they needed a place where they could tell the whole story of their ministries and know that others would really listen.

Over the next few meetings the group developed a covenant. They agreed that they would hold one another accountable for sabbath keeping and for sticking to the commitments they made to themselves, their families and their congregations. They agreed not to tell stories about each other outside the group unless given permission. If any of them found themselves sinking into trouble, the group would not serve as a replacement for therapy. They also agreed that if a matter arose that the group thought warranted the attention of a denominational leader, the pastor involved would take responsibility to seek such assistance, and the group would hold the pastor to that promise.

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As their conversations deepened, they recognized the importance of soaking their meetings in prayer. They decided to begin each meeting with a time of worship to invite the Holy Spirit to draw near, to place their concerns in God's hands and to bless one another along the way. They pledged to pray for one another between meetings and to pray for each other's churches.

The group members quickly understood that the support they were seeking was not merely for themselves but also for their ministries. "Sharing and caring," as one minister put it, was helpful, but it wasn't enough. As they reflected on the meaning of excellence, they began to articulate the ways they wanted to grow as pastors.

In their early meetings, the members of this fledgling group spent time telling about their congregations. They began to see that they didn't all do things the same way and that each pastor and each congregation had different strengths. They recognized that this diversity offered them an opportunity to learn from one another and to gain a richer repertoire of skills for their own ministry. The participants offered to share their own congregation's best ideas, practices and resources. They identified the topics they wanted to explore together, which included such subjects as adult faith formation, preaching during Lent, ministry to young families, staff supervision, membership development and the annual stewardship pledge drive. After generating a long list of topics they wanted to cover, they set priorities.

As the group's members grew excited about the program they had developed for themselves, they realized even more that what they most needed was colleagues with whom to discuss urgent problems and knotty challenges. "I need a safe place where I can admit what I don't know," one pastor declared. They agreed to take turns bringing a case study from their ministry so they could help one another confront the intractable questions, the scary conflicts—and the church members who pushed their buttons.

In sharing their case studies, they tried to be clear with one

another about the feedback they were requesting. Did they just need help in processing the event? Did they want to know if anyone else had experienced something similar and to hear what they had done? Did they want to explore with the group what wisdom about pastoral leadership might be gleaned from the case study?

The group covered a lot of ground in those first meetings largely because of the group facilitator. Her role was not to be just another member of the group but to set the tone and make sure the air was equally shared, with each person getting a chance to speak. She attended to the group's process, calling members back when they strayed off topic, noting places of agreement, restraining everyone from offering unwanted advice, and asking questions that took the conversation to deeper places. It was clear that having a facilitator was worth

much more than the very modest amount each congregation pitched in to pay her stipend. She also kept the group's calendar, e-mailed meeting reminders, kept the agenda, remembered questions that lingered from the

previous meeting and—not least of all—saw to it that the meeting space was prepared, the opening worship service planned, the coffee on and the lunch ordered.

To the pastors, being able to show up without having to think about the details of the meeting felt like receiving a gift. For some, these meetings served as the only place where they were able to worship fully, free of leadership responsibilities.

As they prayed for one another, they also felt deeply cared for. One pastor commented, "When I had a really difficult funeral to do, what a blessing it was to know that throughout that service I was being held in prayer by the members of my clergy group."

The members were surprised by how much they laughed when they were together. "We help each other hold things more lightly," one minister explained, "to relax a bit so we can see things from a fresh perspective and find our center again."

One participant, relatively new in ministry, said, "Everything in ministry can be so loud. The group helps me to turn down the volume so I can sort out what needs my atten-

For resources on pastoral excellence  
and on structuring peer groups,  
go to [christiancentury.org](http://christiancentury.org)



tion most and what I can let go of.” Said another pastor: “It’s been so healing to hear that my struggles are shared struggles.” And from another: “I’m amazed at the clarity and insight we draw out of each other. Sometimes it seems the wisdom has been there all along. It just needed room and the right question to be able to rise to the surface. Other times, it feels like the Holy Spirit has intervened, descending on us as we pray with a new gift that makes a difference in our ministry.”

One pastor in the group went through an intense season of conflict with his congregation. He said he found encouragement every time he looked at his calendar and saw that his peer group meeting was coming up. When the storm finally passed, he told his peers that without them he would not have been able to weather the situation with as much patience and emotional maturity as he had. Without the peer group, he might no longer even be in ministry.

Looking back after several years of meetings, a minister reflected, “All of us could have made bad choices or costly mistakes had we not been in this confidential conversation once a month. It has led me to be a better pastor and leader more than any other single connection I have ever known.”

The account I’ve given here is an amalgam (using actual quotes) of the experiences of pastors in my region who have joined peer groups focused on pastoral excellence. Similar accounts have emerged from peer group projects in various denominations across the country. Thanks to grants from the Lilly Endowment as part of its program on Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, more than 15,000 clergy have been engaged in peer groups over the past nine years.

The lesson emerging from every peer group project is that when clergy meet regularly in a “community of practice” for

# A ROOM OF OUR OWN

by Katherine Willis Pershey

THE FOUR OF US women have a room of our own. One wall is all fireplace and mantle and built-in bookshelves, and another is fitted with clean glass panes overlooking rain falling on mossy woods. Behind me, the open floor plan puts our dirty breakfast dishes on display; to my left, a tapestry covers an impressive portion of the wood paneling. Each of us is curled on a couch with a book or a laptop. Two of us have babies in our laps, having mastered the art of rocking a child while typing a sermon.

Our clergy writing group has been meeting on a mostly monthly basis for the last year, and we are on retreat in a borrowed Lake Michigan cottage. We normally gather in church libraries and for the occasional family potluck, but this time we actually pulled off an overnight retreat—and we’re delighted. Our elementary schoolchildren are home with their fathers, and our preschoolers are in another wing of the house being entertained by the babysitter we brought along. We have everything we might pos-

sibly require to write: a quiet space, plenty of food, a trustworthy nanny, a wireless connection and, perhaps most important, one another.

In the summer of 2010, not a month into my new ministry call, I was afforded a study leave to participate in a writing program at the Collegeville Institute. The chance to write and to wander amidst the lakes and monks of the St. John’s University campus came at a crucial time, as my recent cross-country move had put me behind on my book project. It was a lovely week: peaceful and productive and a great deal of fun. I knocked out two chapter drafts and a revision, which alone would have been enough to call it a smashing success.

But the most important thing I wrote that week was an e-mail to three clergywomen in the Chicago area, inviting them to participate in a writing group. It was an impulsive move, and a bit of a gamble. We hadn’t all met, and the ones I had met I liked enough but certainly didn’t know well. There was a chance we might not

click, and what pastor wants to squeeze a dysfunctional peer group into her already hectic schedule? But I knew they were great writers and sensed they were also great pastors, and I felt a thrill when their responses came back quickly and enthusiastically: *Yes. I’m in. I need this.*

The group’s design and intentions were worked out over coffee. We agreed that what we most needed was the accountability of external deadlines and serious feedback. We would send one another work via e-mail and convene for critique and conversation on the second Wednesday of the month.

The first round went well. The Methodist had a knack for theologically astute social commentary, while the Lutheran’s poems were filled with rich language and story and closed with notes of grace. The Presbyterian’s whip-smart take on a poignant mission-trip detour demolished the stereotype that youth ministers don’t think theologically. And the critiques were equally formidable—I drove away knowing precisely how to



intentional reflection on their ministry, they find that trust develops, anxieties diminish, and challenges turn into occasions for learning. (The term *community of practice* is borrowed from educational theorist Etienne Wenger, who defines a community of practice as a “group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”) Pastors are helping one another stay connected to the joy of ministry. As they gather together, prayer fills the air, laughter shakes the room, competition flies away, confidence takes deeper root. Conflicts are addressed before they escalate or become entrenched, a dynamic which at least in some quarters is changing the role of denominational executives who are spending less time putting out fires.

As clergy meet regularly to lean on one another and learn together, calmer and more generous pastoral spirits are grow-

ing in the rich soil of real community. Once pastors experience the transforming power of this community, they can no longer imagine doing ministry without it. They practice with one another the kind of life they hope for the members of their congregations and they look for ways to take the experience home.

For many years, clergy have told stories about the isolation and loneliness of ministry. But a new story is beginning to be told about how clergy find affirmation and support, guidance and accountability, as they meet in peer groups. Is this a new narrative? Perhaps. Or perhaps pastors are simply living out something that the church has known but not always embodied among its leaders: excellence in a Christian context is expressed most fully in communal terms. At the center of Christian life, after all, is a commitment to community and a promise from Jesus that he will show up whenever two or three are gathered in his name. CC

heal an ailing essay. I couldn't wait for our next gathering. None of us could.

**A**n e-mail conversation unfolded, slowly at first. It covered compelling online articles, queries for ministry ideas and particularly bad parenting meltdowns. Before long, I opened my inbox to a steady stream of collegial solidarity. By the time we met for our second formal workshop, our common experience as pastors, mothers and writers had bound us into an alliance. We are ambitious but not competitive.

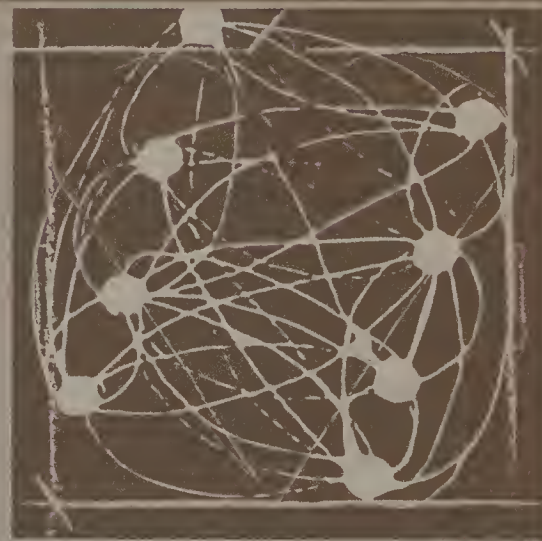
Within months, it seemed that one's byline belonged to all; one's acceptance into an MFA program was not hers alone but ours. Likewise, we helped one another shoulder the inevitable rejections, failures and inadequacies of our personal and professional lives. In the year since we first organized ourselves, we have completed a manuscript and signed a book contract, birthed two babies and sat vigil during a father's operation, left a pastoral call and pondered what comes next. We did these things, in the parlance of the independent study program at the Collegeville Institute, “apart, and yet a part,” each leg of the journey made more bearable on account of the company.

We convene as women who are both

pastors and writers. This reminds us that we have been called to a ministry of words, just as we have been called to the ministry of word and sacrament. It would be easy to neglect our literary endeavors, to watch them shrivel on the vine as we attend to more pressing responsibilities. Writing may not be a part of our pastoral job descriptions, but we have each discerned a call to serve Christ by writing for the church. Implicitly and explicitly, we hold one another accountable to this secondary calling.

And, as we discovered recently during a conversation about our future plans together, the writing is indeed secondary. When we asked ourselves what would deeply disappoint us, it wasn't the prospect of struggling as writers. What would devastate us would be if one of us left ministry. We would feel as though we had failed her somehow, having not provided the support she needed to persevere in her ordination vows. We are pastors first—albeit much happier and more faithful and fulfilled pastors with a bit of writing on the side.

I have been and continue to be part of some great clergy groups, as well as a few not so great ones. They are denominational, ecumenical, funded by grants, entirely DIY. I haven't observed a pat-



tern for success. Is it the ones that are arbitrarily assigned that flounder? Does institutional funding guarantee success? Is it enough simply to chat over brunch, or do you need an agenda? How, for the love of God, does a clergy group avoid the poison of clergy groups everywhere: that endless loop of complaining about congregations and co-workers?

There's no formula, but I don't think we would thrive as a group without such a high level of commitment to one another and our common vocations. We also owe some of our success to carbohydrates and caffeine. We break bread (read: chocolate croissants), drink coffee and give thanks for the blessing of a room of our own. CC

Katherine Willis Pershey is a pastor in Western Springs, Illinois.



# ‘Living my truth’

by Amy Frykholm

**UNITED METHODIST** minister Amy DeLong was charged by the United Methodist Church with violating the church’s Book of Discipline on two counts: 1) continuing her ministry while being a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” and 2) conducting a holy union ceremony for two women. In the trial that ended in June 2011, DeLong, a pastor in Osceola, Wisconsin, was found not guilty on the first charge (by a 12 to 1 vote) and guilty on the second charge (by a 9 to 4 vote).

In reference to her guilt on the second charge, the jury asked DeLong, in conjunction with the complainant in the case and other United Methodist clergy, to produce a document (a draft is due this month) that considers how to resolve issues that “harm the clergy covenant, create an adversarial spirit or lead to future clergy trials.” The document will be considered at the clergy session of the church’s 2012 General Conference.

## Can you tell us about your upbringing?

I was born and raised in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. My parents were members of a United Church of Christ church. The irony of that, given all that has happened, is not lost on me—the UCC ordains openly gay clergy and approves of same-sex marriage.

When I went to college, I got involved with a United Methodist church where, for whatever reason, something clicked. I liked the church and congregation. They were open-minded and taught me not just what to think but how to think. I appreciated their social justice work and the social justice work of United Methodism as a whole. I wasn’t thinking about ministry at that time, but the church became my spiritual home.

## How did you come to enter the ministry?

After college I did a master’s in theology, and I found that I had a propensity and passion for all things theological. At my church, since not every 23-year-old has a master’s in theology, I started getting more involved in teaching and worship. About that time, I joined a Disciples Bible study. I met my partner, Val, in that Bible study. We fell in love there, and it was there that my gifts for ministry were affirmed. My love for my partner and my love for the church blossomed at the same time. There was no way that I could silence that work of love, of the Holy Spirit working in my life.

## How did the holy union ceremony come about?

In the spring of 2009 I received a phone call from a couple that wanted to have a holy union. I did not know them, but I

did not do anything for them different from what I do with heterosexual couples. I met with them a few times and then agreed to do the ceremony. It was obvious that they loved each other deeply. Wisconsin had begun a registry for same-gender domestic partnerships, and this couple wanted a religious ceremony to accompany the registration. So we started premarital counseling, and eventually I performed the ceremony.

People ask me, “Why did you do this one?” The answer is that it was and is the only same-sex holy union that I have ever been asked to do. I was very open with them. I wanted them to know what the UMC says about unions and about gay people. I wanted them to know what they were getting into. I didn’t want them in the center of a controversy if they didn’t want to be, but I let them know that I had no plans to keep the ceremony a secret.

**“I will not collude with a system meant to do me harm.”**

## How did your denomination respond?

As an extension minister, I have to fill out a report every year about my ministry. I simply listed the holy union under my activities. I thought, “I don’t know if anybody even reads these.” After just a couple days I had a note in the mail asking me to meet with a bishop’s assistant. I brought with me my sermon from the wedding, the bulletin, the pictures, the invitations—everything.

I knew that I would not be apologizing for having done the wedding. I would say and have said many times since then that it was one of the greatest joys of my ministry.

I did find it ironic that I would be called in over this. I’ve never had a bishop or a leader in the church or a pastor who didn’t know that I was gay. Everyone knows Val. They ask about Val. It’s not even that they turn a blind eye. Val is very much connected to my ministry. I couldn’t help but think, “Come on, why am I sitting here now because I did a wedding?”

The bishop’s assistant put up his hands and said to me: “Self-avowed practicing homosexual”—that’s the disciplinary language. This is language that as a gay person in the church, I have wrestled with forever and ever. I said, “Val and I aren’t practicing any more.” He said, “What?” I said, “No, we are pretty good at it by now.” He laughed.



I had not considered that there would be a trial. I simply had vowed to myself that I was no longer going to participate in the discriminatory system of the church that was designed to hurt me. I could easily have just left the holy union off the report. But there was no way that I was not going to report it.

The UMC has become so draconian in its rules. If the bishop admits to knowing that I was gay, then she gets in trouble. The system is set up so the truth will not be told. But I had decided that I am going to be truthful. I understand that there are consequences, but I will not collude with a system meant to do me harm. An official complaint had to be filed for the church to proceed with a trial. That came from the district superintendent.

## “The system is set up so the truth will not be told.”

### How did you prepare for the trial?

I gathered together 25 people to walk this journey with me. I was surrounded by love and care, good counsel and a lot of wisdom. The oldest person on my team was over 80, the youngest in her twenties. I had generations of experience. It was astonishing, the level of care. It was a precious time for me. I am in no way crushed by the church or a victim of it. Because I am living my truth and there is no more hiding, I got to experience the positive things that come with doing that.

### Were there any surprises for you in the process?

When the outcome of the trial was announced, I was surprised by how much I had already let go of no longer being the Reverend Amy DeLong. I had already grieved over the potential loss of my credentials and did not expect to wake up the morning after the trial and still be a United Methodist minister. I had done so much preemptive grieving that I had to adjust when the trial was over.

The trial court also surprised me. They chose to look at this situation and make a decision that was groundbreaking and creative, not punitive—a decision bent toward restorative justice. People have said to me, “They just slapped your hand,” but that misses the important and profound work this group did.

### What was the outcome of the trial?

The outcome doesn’t lend itself to media sound bytes. On the charge of being a “self-avowed practicing homosex-



ual,” I was found not guilty. The word *practicing* has not been thought out very well and that became apparent in the trial.

For example, someone actually had to ask me if my partner and I engaged in genital contact. I was very clear that I would not answer such intimate questions in a setting meant to do me harm. I will not be defined in such reductionist terms. The shame of asking is on the church. No heterosexual couples are ever asked if they still engage in genital contact in their marriages. The prosecution kept asking if I was a “self-avowed practicing homosexual,” and I kept saying, “I would never talk about myself this way.”

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I was found guilty of having conducted a holy union. They had all the evidence for that. The couple whose union I performed took the stand. The trial court had the church bulletin and all the materials. There was no question that this ceremony had taken place.

The trial court asked, "What could bring some healing to this situation?" They could see that I was found guilty of blessing a couple—an offense of love.

### What was asked of you as a result?

They asked me to work in collaboration with my bishop, an elder, the district supervisor who brought the charges, and the chair of ordained ministry to produce a document that would help prevent further clergy trials and that would aid in resolving this conflict. I had 20 days for discernment to decide if I wanted to be a part of this process. But I knew I wanted to be a part of it.

The first thing I did was send a letter to all of those who had, in a sense, been sentenced with me to ask if they also wanted to participate. I said that if any of them did not, I would accept my suspension instead and I would not reveal why. All of them wrote back to say they were willing.

A lot of our group's conversation has focused on the words *clergy covenant* in the Book of Discipline.

### Why that term?

The sentencing document refers to "issues that harm the clergy covenant." That phrase was also used a lot in the trial—as if we all understand what it means. The Book of Discipline only mentions it once, and that's in relation to why clergy don't take oaths. There was a sense that I did something that broke the clergy covenant, but that covenant is never defined.

I asked everyone at the table to define *clergy covenant*. All five of us had vastly different answers, not even overlapping in some cases. It was clear to me that the phrase has the potential to be used to bludgeon people into conformity without a clear meaning.

### What does *clergy covenant* mean to you?

To me the covenant is to minister to



all people, to live out the example of Jesus and to help people recognize the presence of God in their lives. In both my relationship to my partner and in performing this union, I upheld that covenant. Potential jurors at the trial, elders, were dismissed from service if they answered yes when asked about whether they are governed by a higher authority than current church law. That is stunning. These laws change every four years at the UMC General Conference. Thousands of resolutions come in to change the Book of Discipline.

### What is the core of your ministry?

I found the core of my ministry when I decided that I was going to be authentic and tell the truth. That would guide my ministry, knowing that I will have all kinds of opposition. Working out of that sense of integrity, knowing that I am a beloved child of God—that is my core.

### What do you think the ideal role of marriage is or should be in our society? Should there, for example, be a separation between secular marriage and Christian marriage, as some have proposed?

I have wrangled with this question, and I don't know the answer. I have been given authority through my ordination to offer blessings to folks who love each other. We know that marriage is one of our most evolving institutions. There was a time

when it was primarily an exchange of property; at other times it has been an exchange of labor, a "helpmeet" model. In this culture, it has become primarily about love: two consenting adults who love and care for each other and want to spend their lives together.

I know in other cultures there is a real separation between the legal arm of marriage and the church. But in America, pastors become an arm of the state. Should we get out of that business? I think that would be great. Pastors know that you get tons of requests for weddings from people who have no commitment to the church.

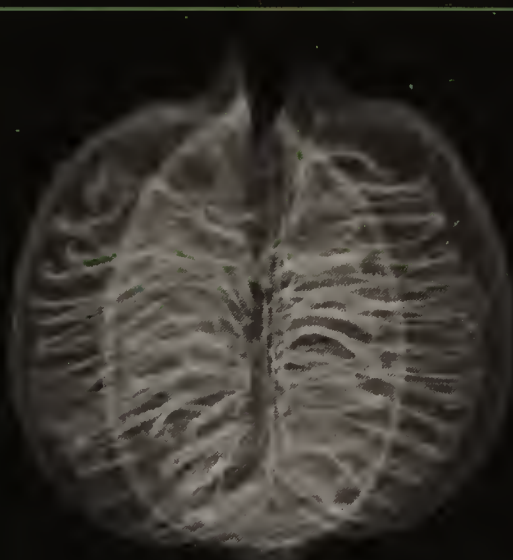
### Why do you stay a United Methodist?

When people ask me that, I say, "because I was a Girl Scout, and as a Girl Scout you learn to always leave a place as good as or better than you found it." I don't know anyone who makes a commitment to an organization because it already is exactly as it should be. Discrimination and injustice are beneath us, and we need to do better.

### What is your reasonable hope for change in the United Methodist Church?

My experience is that hope is never reasonable. My hope is that we will honor all that God has created, and that isn't reasonable at all.

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*Red Yucca, 2011*  
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# How to follow the leader

by Anthony B. Robinson

**WHEN THEIR PASTOR'S** tenure came to a sudden and disappointing end, members of First Church took the usual steps: they called an interim minister and formed a pastoral search committee. But then they took an unusual step: they created a leadership task force and directed its members to delve into such questions as "What's involved in leading this congregation?" and "What type of leadership do we need and will we support?"

First Church was off to a good start. There's a lot to be learned about leadership, both in the classroom and with on-the-job experience. Today there are many books and articles on congregational leadership. Seminaries have responded to the need and offer courses and even degrees in leadership. There are dangers, however, in overemphasizing leadership as a key to success. At the congregational level, members may begin to think that getting the right leader will magically fix a church's problems.

Fortunately, the First Church governing board didn't end its charge by asking questions about leadership. Members insisted that the task force also give attention to the practice of what they called "followership." What are the responsibilities of a congregation and its members, they asked, to make the relationship with a pastor work well?

Following doesn't command the interest that leading does. While most high-powered colleges and universities would, for example, describe their mission as "preparing tomorrow's leaders," it's difficult to imagine a college that would tout itself as "preparing tomorrow's followers." But following is crucial. First Church members took the word *followership* from Unitarian minister Paul Beedle, who defines it as "the discipline of supporting leaders and helping them to lead well. It is not submission, but the wise and good care of leaders, done out of a sense of gratitude for their willingness to take on the responsibilities of leadership, and a sense of hope and faith in their abilities and potential."

Beedle cautions that many are wary of leadership and know that it can be conceived and practiced as an authoritarian exercise of power. A better alternative recognizes good leaders and good followers, who act as partners, with those in one role enhancing and contributing to the growth and flourishing of the other. Good followers remain free to think for themselves but recognize a responsibility to help leaders lead well.

What is the nature and practice of good followership? For

Christians, it's hardly a foreign concept. After all, the Gospels begin with Jesus saying, "Follow me." A disciple is a student of a teacher, an apprentice of a master. To be a Christian means "following Jesus"—listening to him, learning from him and doing what he does.

If following is an essential starting point and foundation for Christian faith and life, then the stories of the disciples provide an important dose of realism; it turns out that they aren't especially good at following Jesus. Whether it's Peter telling Jesus that suffering and death aren't part of the program or James and John lobbying for key positions in the new administration, the disciples aren't paragons of faithfulness and insight. They are works in progress.

**A leader can't be effective without followers who are willing to take risks.**

And so are we. By becoming mature and engaged followers of the leaders we call and elect in the church, we demonstrate one aspect or expression of Christian discipleship. I would suggest that there are five ways that we can work on being good followers.

**G**ood followers recognize that leadership is necessary, important and difficult work. I worked with a congregation in a university neighborhood that was unsure about the value of leadership. Its members didn't really think they needed a pastor, so they hired a "coordinator of ministries" who would synchronize the expression of their many gifts and interests. "We have lots of smart, capable people in our church," they argued. "We don't need someone telling us what to do."

Of course good leaders seldom "tell people what to do." Instead, as Ron Heifetz says, they help a congregation to identify its own most pressing problems and important chal-

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*Anthony B. Robinson is president of Seattle-based Congregational Leadership Northwest. His most recent book is Stewardship for Vital Congregations (Pilgrim).*



lenges, and then to mobilize faith and resources to take on those challenges.

In this respect leadership is not mainly an office, title or position; it is a function, and it can be a dangerous one. “You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs and habits of a lifetime,” says Heifetz. You may have a passionate conviction about a project or the future and want people to share it, but when you tell them something they don’t want to hear but need to hear, they may see only what they have to lose and not what they stand to gain. Leadership is necessary for the health and vitality of congregations, and it is tough, challenging work. A leader can’t do this work unless there are followers who respond to the leadership and are willing to take some risks.

**G**ood followers share a commitment to a larger congregational purpose or mission and the priorities derived from it. Often troubled congregations experience what consultant Peter Steinke calls “mission drift.” They lack a clear or shared sense of core purpose. Their documents may cite familiar biblical texts on the church’s mission and they may have a lengthy mission statement, but it remains an ideal and an abstraction. They do not function in ways that are compelling but have a host of interests and agendas that are in competition with one another.

This is where discipline comes in. The First Church congregation put it this way: “Followership requires an overriding commitment to the good of the organization regardless of whether there is complete agreement.” I would add, “Good followership entails a commitment to the mission of the church.” Healthy congregations will have different groups and interests within the larger whole, but will regularly refocus on their common purpose.

Leaders are more likely to be successful and effective when there is a clear shared purpose, one that is biblically grounded and theologically sound—and leaders may have to guide the work that leads to such a purpose. They will then continue to emphasize and interpret it, keeping their congregation aware of and focused on its vision.

**G**ood followers cultivate relationship and trust. Some years ago Michael Kinnamon, who recently stepped down as general secretary of the National Council of Churches, reflected in these pages on his contentious and unsuccessful candidacy to head the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination (“Restoring mainline trust: Disagreeing in love,” July, 1992). Kinnamon noted that in some ways there

wasn’t much difference between his supporters and opponents. All of them, he said, offered a support that was conditional and not based in relationship or trust.

“I began to worry about some of the many supportive letters I was receiving. To say ‘I am pleased with your nomination because we agree on A, B and C’ is not fundamentally different from saying ‘I urge the church to reject your nomination

**For leaders, specific feedback is more valuable than generalized praise.**

because we disagree on X, Y and Z.’ Both responses point toward what may be a critical issue before us: the incredible and growing politicization of our life as a community.”

As Kinnamon saw it, support for his candidacy was conditional and limited. “You have my support if I have your agreement on a specific list of issues.” Failure to toe this line would quickly result in withdrawal of support. While this ideological approach is more common in national denominational life than in the local congregation, trust remains in short supply. Followers must offer support that’s not conditional or fickle.



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They must support a leader and be able to disagree without severing the relationship.

First Church called this issue “management of expectations.” “Followership allows room for disagreement, but also requires the management of expectations.”

Some traditions call the partnership between leader and follower “covenantal.” Unlike a contractual relationship, which spells out what each party will give and get in the deal, a covenantal relationship asks each party to commit to a relationship without knowing in advance everything that the relationship will entail, require of each party or give back.

**G**ood followers practice the art of learning and giving good feedback. I recall overhearing this conversation between one of my own mentors and a parishioner at the door of the church after worship. “That was a great sermon,” said the parishioner beaming. The pastor replied, “What was great about it?” Her question seemed abrupt, even rude, to me. But the pastor knew that effusive praise can be easy and even unhelpful. She was asking for something specific.

In her book *Becoming the Pastor You Hope to Be*, Barbara Blodgett gives extended attention to the difference between praise and feedback. She argues that praise is short-lived and often counterproductive in the long term. Honest feedback is more valuable.

Blodgett notes that praise tends to focus on the person (“You are the best pastor we’ve ever had” or “Your sermon was the greatest sermon ever”). Sometimes this extravagant praise flips over into equally extravagant and unfocused criticism (“She’s just the wrong pastor for us”). Feedback, in contrast, tends to focus on actions and behaviors.

“The difference between praise and feedback often comes down to the difference between generalities and specifics, as well as the difference between person-



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focused versus action-focused reflections,” says Blodgett. “The latter require more work of your observers. We pastors need to train ourselves and others not to praise *us* but rather what we *do*. There is a subtle but important difference for example between being told, ‘You really know your Bible,’ and ‘That was a great Bible study.’ And even better than ‘That was a great Bible study’ is to be told ‘That was a great Bible study because you helped us connect the Good Samaritan story to our own lives.’” While giving thoughtful feedback is more work, it is part of the practice of good followership.

**Good followers keep boundaries.** In recent years, clergy have heard a lot about boundaries, particularly those that have to do with sexual behavior. Parishioners need to observe boundaries too. Troubled congregations often have a pattern of too many people treating everything as their business, their arena of concern and their involvement.

Take personnel issues. When a member of the church staff is put on probation, disciplined or even terminated, it is the business of only a few people: the employee, his or her supervisor and the personnel committee. Yet it’s common for all sorts of people in a congregation to think it’s their business and to insert themselves into the situation even though it’s against the law to discuss an employee’s record or performance with people who are not in one of the roles or positions cited above. When this happens, serious problems become crises.

Sometimes congregations do business the way six-year-olds play soccer—they play “bunch ball.” Everyone runs to the ball. Everyone has to be in on every decision. No one plays his or her position. It doesn’t work in soccer and it doesn’t work in church life and governance. Good following means knowing what tasks and business have “your name on it” and which ones don’t. It involves a respect for the roles that help govern a congregation and not overstepping them.

Congregations that honor boundaries do so by committing to the regular training of lay leaders. A Presbyterian church in North Carolina holds an annual event for its elected elders. On Friday evening all who have ever served as elders (more than 200 people) are honored at a banquet featuring a speaker. On Saturday there is a training event for current lay leaders. In addition, the pastoral staff of the congregation stresses faith formation as a part of its training and equipping of lay leaders. The investment has paid off. The leaders are also followers. They feel valued when they’re training and learning, and they experience spiritual growth. They’ve learned that congregations that invest in lay leaders get both stronger leaders and better followers.

I spoke with a member of First Church about its focus on followership. She said, “We’ve realized we too have a part in making this work.” I’m pretty sure she already understood this bit of wisdom, but I’m also sure that all congregations need that reminder.

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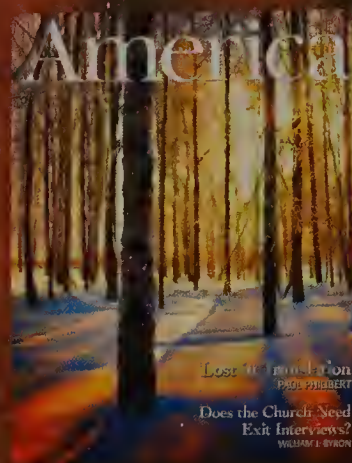
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by Thomas G. Long

## Feedback frenzy

PERHAPS IT'S self-flattery, but I'm wondering why everyone wants my opinion these days. Hardly a day goes by that I am not asked to share my judgment of some product, experience or person. The deep discount airport hotel where I bunked for a few hours between flights last month wants me to rate my room (the TV was broken and there was a faint odor of rotting cabbage). Amazon invites me to spout my opinions of books and to flag other people's reviews as "helpful" or not. Facebook lets me pretend to be a Roman emperor who sends posters to their fate with a thumbs up or a thumbs down. The *Huffington Post* inquires whether I find its religion essays "amazing," "inspiring," "hot" or "weird," while Delta Airlines wonders if I had a "satisfactory gate experience" in Denver and if the gate agent called me by name (wait, let me check my diary).

It is tempting to see this rush to solicit my views as a sign that megacorporations are finally getting serious about customer service, that someone at headquarters truly cares whether my hotel bed was comfortable, and that a Delta manager might actually call Denver to say, "His name is Tom Long. Don't forget next time." But somehow I doubt that. The constant badgering for my opinion seems less about service and more about sales. If I can be persuaded that someone cares what I think, I can be lulled into believing that I am rowing my little consumer boat with purpose and direction and that companies are carving out safe harbors for my whims. In fact I am being swept along a churning Niagara River of marketing ploys and corporate indifference. I'm grinning and flashing a thumbs up even as I plunge over the falls.

I wonder about the larger cultural meaning of being summoned to make flash judgments about everything from restaurant entrées to couples on *Dancing with the Stars*. How healthy can it be to think of life not as something to be lived and savored, but as a series of episodes that I am expected—and entitled—to rate up or down? Moreover, the cloak of anonymity on the Internet can summon our worst spirits. "Our waiter was a rude jerk. Fire him," posted a cranky diner. When CNN recently ran a moving feature about the personal life and struggles of one of America's most respected ministers, a reader commented, "Yawn. God is not real. Jesus is not real. This dude's whole life was based on a lie. Next story." Are we being turned into toddlers who dump our applesauce onto the floor, screaming, "Don't like! Don't like!"?

It seems trivial to think that Jesus would care about any of this, but I think Jesus was concerned about the role of judgment in forming our personal and social character. When he

warned, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged," he was not thinking about rental cars or cell phone service, but he was speaking to our tendency to make judgment a sharp edge on our character, an inclination to filter the whole of life through narrow judgmental slits.

It is neither possible nor desirable to go through life without making any judgments. When we consider Jesus' full statement on the matter, though, it turns out that he is not prohibiting judgment but tempering it, reframing it. Yes, he does say, "Judge not," but he follows that immediately with a process, namely, taking the log from our own eye before removing the speck in another's. "Judge not" is not a stop sign; it's a flashing yellow caution light: when you judge, judge not as the culture does. Don't leave yourself and a proper humility out of the equation. Before publicly smearing mud all over a waiter, remember that you stand knee-deep in the muck and mire yourself.

## Are we being turned into toddlers who scream, "Don't like! Don't like!"?

There is also an eschatological breeze blowing through Jesus' word on judgment, which means, among other things, that no experience or encounter can be fully assessed in the present tense. Until God gathers up all time, we don't know the whole value or meaning of any isolated moment. As the spiritual says, "Oh, nobody knows who I am, who I am, till the Judgment Morning." Even in something as routine as a brief encounter with a hotel desk clerk or a waiter, life is so textured, so nuanced, so rich with the possibility for discovery, so full of gift and grace, so mysterious and charged with intimations of the coming reign of God, that it is at least premature and at worst a sin to flatten it into thumbs-up, thumbs-down judgments.

So the next time Delta asks me to evaluate a gate agent, I'll need to give the matter more thought. It might puzzle them when I respond, "I won't know until Resurrection Day." Or maybe I'll log on as Julian and respond, "All will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."

---

Thomas G. Long teaches at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and is the author of *Preaching from Memory to Hope*.



# IN Review

## Aftershocks

by Chris Herlinger

Paul Farmer has a keen sense of the widespread tendency to portray Haitians as helpless victims. That is well evident in this poignant chronicle of the year that began with the January 12, 2010, earthquake and ended with commemorations in Haiti marking the event—which were often sad, empty affairs. It seemed at that time as if an opportunity had been lost and Haiti was once again falling into old patterns, and as if the world was already neglecting a country that a year earlier had received an outpouring of international compassion, what Farmer calls “a tsunami of generosity.”

Farmer, a Harvard professor and a physician with longtime experience in Haiti, is UN deputy special envoy for Haiti under former president Bill Clinton (he admits he is not as comfortable in the public spotlight as his “indefatigable” boss). He writes that most of the ceremonies of the January 12, 2011, anniversary “went by in a haze.” He recalls not feeling particularly “prayerful” and reports that he retreated to a Haitian friend’s home in Port-au-Prince “to contemplate the year quietly and alone.”

It is telling that Farmer, a cofounder of the respected humanitarian organization Partners in Health, uses the word *haze* because much of this world-weary book—part memoir, part useful (if somewhat dispassionate) explanation of the complexities of humanitarian work in Haiti—has the somber, funereal tone of someone still traumatized. I don’t mean that as a criticism. It’s hard not to admire Farmer, who works at the highest international policy levels; commutes between Port-au-Prince, New York, Boston and his home in Rwanda; and does his best to

see that humanitarian assistance does right by Haiti while he mourns Haitian and non-Haitian colleagues and friends who perished in the quake.

The shock of the earthquake for someone who has spent years trying to improve the quality of Haiti’s health-care system registers early in the book, in a somber but beautifully penned passage in which Farmer recalls landing in Port-au-Prince soon after the quake. He says that he “never arrived with a heavier heart than on that day”:

As soon as we opened the door, it hit us: a charnel-house stench filled the air of the windswept runway. I knew this smell but never imagined I would encounter it in an open space. Now it hung over the city like a filthy, clinging garment—the stench of a battlefield without the violence or din of war. Except for airplanes and helicopters, there was silence.

Farmer laments that the Haitian people have long been “excluded from any meaningful discussion of their fate”—a dynamic that seems to be continuing among international policy makers since the quake. (Farmer praises Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as a notable exception.) Haitians grieve “the inability of state and non-state providers to provide basic succor to those in great need, in spite of the large presence of humanitarians and NGOs,” Farmer writes. “These sentiments—these complaints—have been the constant companions of almost everyone working in Haiti to deliver such services.”

The expression of such frustration betrays a physical and psychical exhaustion that eventually catches up with

### Haiti after the Earthquake

By Paul Farmer

PublicAffairs, 456 pp., \$27.99



many Haitian and non-Haitian humanitarian workers. Farmer writes of savoring the hopeful moment of a hospital groundbreaking, only—“as ever in Haiti”—to have the moment “crowded out by anxiety and even dread: anxiety, for many of us, about how we were going to run such a hospital once it was built, and dread because a new epidemic, long feared, was about to hit Haiti.” (Farmer is referring to a cholera epidemic that slowed recovery efforts in late 2010 and is still doing great harm.)

Yet Farmer’s exhaustion might also be due to something else, and Farmer hints at it once or twice. Perhaps he is not fully comfortable in, or suited to, the role of policy insider.

*Haiti after the Earthquake* is as good an introductory book as any to the complexities of Haiti. It contains a nimble explanation of the historical roots of Haiti’s troubles, as well as supplemental contributions by colleagues and friends such as the Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat. But with its “insider asides” it sometimes seems like too careful and cautious a book. I missed some of Farmer’s old fire, displayed in *The Uses of Haiti*, in which he takes on pernicious U.S. policies toward Haiti, including those implemented while Bill Clinton

Chris Herlinger is a New York-based writer with Church World Service and reports frequently on humanitarian issues. His book *Rubble Nation: Haiti’s Pain, Haiti’s Promise*, coauthored with photographer Paul Jeffrey, was published by Seabury.



was president, and in *Pathologies of Power*, his eloquent affirmation of medical ethics and human rights.

Farmer has not given up on Haiti or the idea that Haitians need to control their own destiny. He makes clear that a key factor in Haiti's success will be fashioning a state that provides things like a functioning health system. After all, he writes, "what institutions confer the right to health care? Not NGOs, universities, or patients and their families; not aid agencies or the UN. The government confers rights." Farmer soundly quotes Franklin D. Roosevelt on this score: "Public health . . . is a responsibility of the state as [is] the duty to promote general welfare. The state educates its children. Why not keep them well?"

One thing is clear above all, Farmer argues: "Until the basic needs of the Haitian majority are met—food and shelter, education and health care, jobs that promote dignity—there will be scant peace in Haiti. This was true before the quake, and it remains so after."

## A Little History of Philosophy

By Nigel Warburton

Yale University Press, 260 pp., \$25.00

Nigel Warburton is a senior lecturer for Britain's Open University, a service originated by the BBC to provide education via television to adults who had not gone on to higher education. *A Little History of Philosophy* is focused on that audience and on anyone else who knows little about philosophy except that it is, as Warburton says, "impenetrable and obscure." The aim of his "little history" is to lift the veil of abstraction and convolution that is so often the besetting flaw of philosophy's classic texts. He achieves that aim—but at a price.

Writing any history of philosophy requires two tasks: deciding what thinkers

*Reviewed by Dennis O'Brien, author of The Church and Abortion: A Catholic Dissent (Rowman & Littlefield), who lives in Middlebury, Vermont.*

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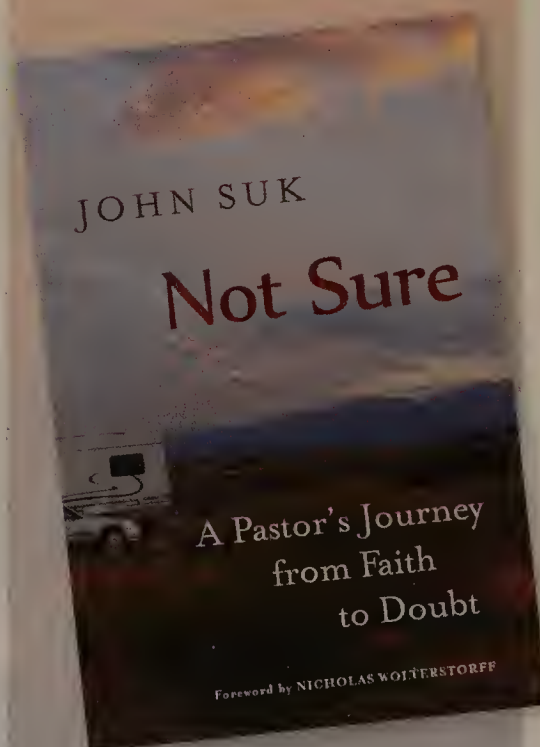
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Foreword by  
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will be included and deciding how their complex works are to be elucidated.

Given that Warburton is presenting only a "little history," his selection of thinkers is certainly reasonable, though some inclusions and omissions will trouble those who are more familiar with the history of philosophy than the book's presumed readers. A philosopher might wonder why Darwin and Freud make it

as philosophers, however influential evolution and psychoanalysis have been in science and culture. And what about Hannah Arendt? Is she a philosopher who belongs in the company of Aristotle and Kant?

Most of the philosophers Warburton discusses are relatively modern: more than half the text is devoted to Kant and the philosophers who followed him.

Selections in the modern period display a general allegiance to English language philosophy in the analytic style. There is only one chapter on non-English philosophy during the 20th century. It covers Sartre, de Beauvoir and Camus. Heidegger appears only as Hannah Arendt's lover. Warburton gives extended treatment to just three women philosophers, all 20th century. His history of philosophy before 1900 is unrelievedly male.

If the selection of thinkers is defensible because of the brevity of the text, how helpful are Warburton's elucidations? After all, there is no use writing an account of a complex thinker like Spinoza that is more difficult to understand than the original. On that score, Warburton's focus on topics that connect with common concerns beyond the classroom is a plus. His themes are "appearance and reality, the nature of the self, questions about God's existence, and how we should live, both individually and as members of society." Given those topics, he can skip the rough going of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and concentrate on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with its discussion of happiness as the goal of life.

In the exposition of his chosen topics, Warburton is at pains to avoid the tendency of philosophers to ramble on as if all wisdom needed to be packed into a single interminable sentence. He writes short sentences in which subject and predicate are in tolerable proximity. You may not agree with every philosopher Warburton discusses, but at least you can see what the philosopher is getting at.

Philosophy cast in short sentences has its limitations. Such brevity may suggest that philosophy can be judged by its conclusions, absent the philosopher's mode of presentation. Boiling down a philosopher's work to doctrine presents philosophy as offering clear truths that are roughly comparable to truths of fact and science. But philosophy is more method than conclusions. Philosophers uniformly avoid straightforward discourse in favor of elaborate modes of indirection. The Socratic dialogues were interpersonal conversations in the marketplace. Kierkegaard published essays under fictional pseudonyms. Nietzsche conjured the myth of the superman. Wittgenstein

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philosophized *viva voce* in agonizing sessions with select attendees. Warburton notes some of these literary quirks but does not connect them to what each philosopher managed to accomplish.

Warburton's discussion of the philosophical treatment of the existence of God is an example of his failure to appreciate modes of presentation. Consider Anselm's ontological argument: since God is a perfect being, God must exist because it would be less than perfect not to exist. Warburton registers the usual philosophical rejection of the argument. That is well and good, but if you go to Anselm's *Proslogion*, you will discover that the ontological argument was offered within something like a prayer to the very God whose existence Anselm was presumably proving. That should strike the reader as strange and raise the question: Just what was Anselm doing? The simplest answer is that he was doing theology, and for that reason, philosophy in the argumentative mode Warburton presents may fail to engage Anselm's text.

If there is a problem with how Warburton presents philosophy, there is also a minor problem with his history of philosophy. A history of philosophy usually traces influences and lines of argument. By that criterion, the philosopher who historically and argumentatively followed Bertrand Russell is Wittgenstein, who studied with Russell and whose *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* demolished Russell's views—much to the latter's despair. Instead Warburton moves from Russell to A. J. Ayer, whose work, however it is judged, is not in the same league with that of either Russell or Wittgenstein. Warburton connects Wittgenstein to Hannah Arendt's account of the Adolf Eichmann trial because if Wittgenstein (given his Jewish ancestry) had remained in Vienna, he might have been one of Eichmann's victims.

I would have no hesitation commending Warburton's work to someone whose mind is a blank slate on the subject of philosophy. His selection of interesting topics and his simple writing style makes *A Little History of Philosophy* a charming read. But I doubt that philosophy can really be charming. Wittgenstein was right: "You can't think decently if you don't want to hurt yourself."

## Neither Calendar nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession

By Piet J. Naudé

Eerdmans, 288 pp., \$25.00 paperback

South Africa became a full democracy with the April 1994 vote to end apartheid. In the long struggle that brought about that transformative decision, parts of the church played a major role, even as other parts vigorously colluded with the apartheid regime.

Few actions in that struggle were more important or more dramatically compelling than the Belhar Confession, a historic statement that was first adopted in draft form in 1982 and was fully adopted as a normative confession by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church ("the so-called colored church") in 1986.

Like every serious confession, this one is located specifically. It was named for a "so-called colored suburb in Cape Town," a community formed as a result of the Group Act of 1950, which dispossessed "nonwhites" and relocated them in segregated townships. With the name Belhar, the confession clearly was intended to "speak from the margins and represented both political and ecclesial schism." The confession grew from and fully articulates the profound church struggle in South Africa, which was a microcosm of the political struggle.

Piet Naudé offers a full exposition of the confession, locating it in context and making clear why attention must still be paid to it. The confession and Naudé's

exposition are deeply informed by Karl Barth, the author and moving spirit of the Nazi-era Barmen Declaration, which Belhar echoes in important ways. Indeed, the title of Naudé's book comes from Barth, who asserted that confession arises on no one's schedule: "Confession is a free action. How could it be otherwise? Like the holy day, it is related to God's free grace. . . . Confession is bound to neither calendar nor clock." God's freedom erupted in the Belhar Confession, which drew the church struggle—and the struggle in society—into the arena of God's will and God's freedom.

The confession consists of five articles, together with extended scriptural support. The first article affirms in crisp fashion faith in the triune God, who cares for the church by word and by Spirit. The fifth article affirms, in doxological formulation, that "Jesus is Lord," with praise for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Sandwiched between these two affirmations, the second, third and fourth articles focus specifically on the church struggle that is at issue. They do not name adversaries but simply tell the evangelical truth about the nature and mission of the church. Article 2 insists that God wills the visible unity of the church, a unity that is given in God's freedom. Article 3 affirms that the church's task is societal reconciliation, and article 4 attests to God's resolve for justice, in which the church has a major role to play. The accents on unity, reconciliation and jus-

*Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann, whose most recent book is Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church (Fortress).*

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tice join issue with the realities of South African apartheid society.

Naudé accents the fact that in the middle articles each affirmation is accompanied by a specific rejection: "Therefore, we reject..." He shows that these negative counterpoints can be framed and understood according to Barth's insistence that every yes of a confession must correspond with a no:

With the Yes expressed in it, i.e., the scriptural exegesis and doctrine positively stated in it, a definite No is also said to the counter-doctrine which is its cause, the latter being rejected as an expression of the Church's unity and its churchly status denied. If this was not its intention, what intention could it have? Without the No the Yes would obviously not be a Yes, but a Yes and No.

Belhar rejects "any doctrine which absolutizes either natural diversity [race] or the sinful separation of people" and that thus breaks the visible and active unity of

the church. It rejects "any doctrine which... sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour," and it rejects "any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice."

Naudé's commentary is enormously helpful for considering the theological homework that generated apartheid's false doctrinal practices and for highlighting the continuing contemporaneity of the confession, even beyond the specific issues of South Africa.

The preparatory work that eventuated in and justified a segregated church is found in the writings of theologians a century earlier that confused ecclesial and ethnic matters so that the church could be organized as a *Volk*. This is especially seen in the important work of Abraham Kuyper. This ethnic perspective could accept a unified church in theory as long as the church was not visibly unified; thus the church could easily be organized along ethnic lines.

In a greatly different situation—the high days of the church growth movement—the compelling argument was that churches would grow when people could be with "their own kind" in homogeneous congregations. The principle can apply to class and ideology as well as race. Even now the church is busy sorting itself out into red and blue in a way that does not require visible engagement with each other. Over a long period, such patterns could overcome the inclusive requirement of a faithful church. The confession challenges and calls out these easy and obvious ways to organize church reality.

In discussing the contemporary significance of the Belhar Confession, Naudé probes the way in which it continues to address "slavery, colonialism, political misrule, and globalization" on a continent that has "a deadly combination of dehumanization and marginalization" in the service of "rampant individualism and crass materialism." As concerns church unity, he writes that the faithful church is "saturated with otherness" and can never be arranged according to "natural diversity." Concerning reconciliation, Naudé mentions the issue of "gender bias" and the reality of "gendered truth," with reference to the status of women and especially of gays and lesbians. Although some Calvinists are dis-

  
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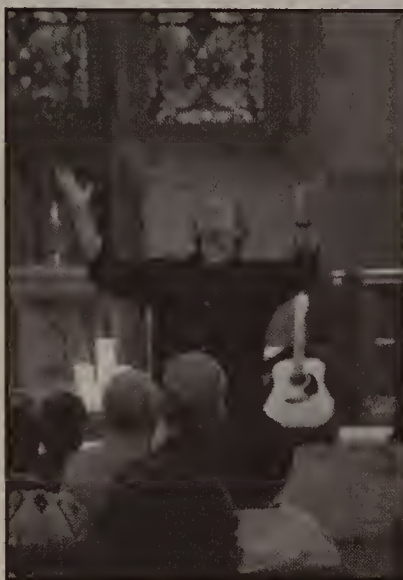
mayed that gays should appeal to Belhar, Naudé shows how that appeal is legitimate and faithful to the confession. Concerning justice, Naudé draws inferences regarding economic issues and the poor. Thus the confession engages with the most disputatious issues and insists that gospel faith has a vigorous say on such matters, precisely because they are at the center of the missional vocation of the visible church.

It may well be that writing confessions is a peculiarly Calvinist enterprise. I submit, however, that others well beyond the Calvinist tradition must be attentive to this document, and therefore this book. It is hard to imagine, in our compromised, therapeutic church in the West (and especially in the U.S.), that there could be a moment of truth that would place the church actively in a situation of *status confessionis*. Such a development is difficult to imagine because such an act of confessing is the drawing of a life-or-death line for the church. But one never knows. Barth wrote of confession: "When its hour comes, it may and must occur." It requires little

imagination to see that the pathologies of greed and violence that pervade society and that divide the church might evoke such demanding work on the church's part. Clearly it will not do to settle for the commonplace of treating the church as a voluntary association when it is in truth the missional body of Christ in the world.

Flabby, careless ecclesial thinking is risky because it permits the church to use

its energy and its resources for casual civil wars that greatly endanger it. Insofar as the church is mandated to seek unity, reconciliation and justice, such indifference is a grave matter for us all. I find that Naudé's exposition requires me to think again, and yet again. I have no doubt that many readers will find in this statement much to ponder and eventually much to decide.



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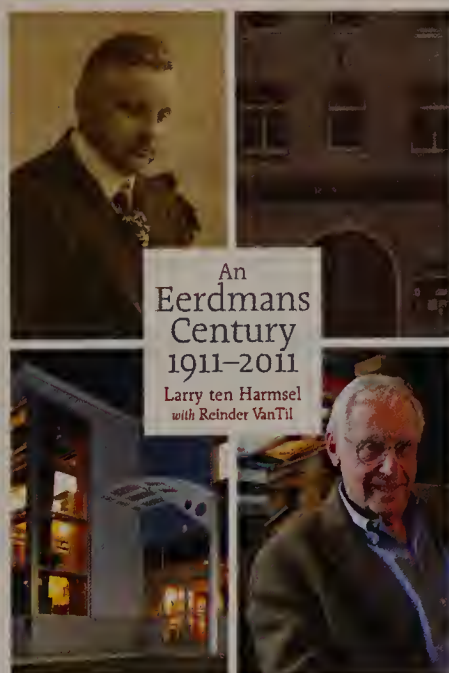


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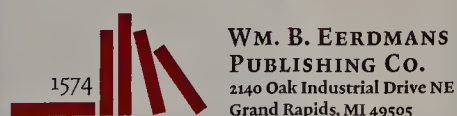
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## BookMarks

### Lutheran Slogans: Use and Abuse

By Robert W. Jenson  
American Lutheran Publicity Bureau,  
80 pp., \$6.00 paperback

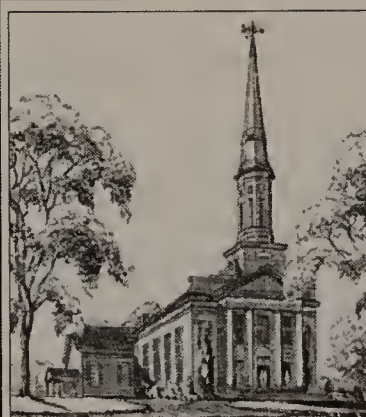
Slogans are necessary, Jenson says, both for practical reasons (we need shortcuts in arguments) and rhetorical ones (we need vivid ways of summing up a position). But problems arise when slogans become “untethered from the complex of ideas and practices which they once evoked.” Jenson defines a slogan as “a placeholder for and pointer to a constellation of arguments and propositions” and proceeds to examine some classic theological slogans (such as “justification by faith,” “sola scriptura,” “priesthood of all believers”) that often get twisted out of shape. For example, “justification by faith” is often used as a stand-alone summary of the Christian message—in which case

faith can easily be construed as another kind of “work” or achievement (“Have I really believed?”). The phrase is meant, he says, not as a summary of the gospel but as a rule about the gospel for preachers that directs them to focus their message on God’s saving work in Jesus rather than on human accomplishments.

### Ghosts of Afghanistan: The Haunted Battleground

By Jonathan Steele  
Counterpoint, 256 pp., \$26.00

Steele, a reporter and columnist for the *Guardian* newspaper, has covered Afghanistan since the former Soviet Union’s occupation in the 1980s. American involvement in Afghanistan should not be compared to the Vietnam War. For parallels we should look instead to the Soviet Union’s experience there. At the heart of Steele’s account are 13 myths about Afghanistan, which he debunks, including the notion that the Taliban invited al-Qaeda to seek sanctuary there.



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The Associate Minister shall act as the primary deputy to the Senior Minister in support of the Church’s mission and vision with direct responsibility for adult education, fellowship, and adult service ministries. The Associate Minister will assist the Senior Minister in caring for the spiritual welfare of the Church, including preaching.

The ideal candidate will have 3 to 5 years minimum experience in ordained ministry, a Master of Divinity or advanced degree in Christian Education, strong preaching skills, the entrepreneurial drive and desire to develop and implement new curricula and programs, and the ability to balance autonomy and initiative with teamwork and a shared goal.

Our nearly 2,000 member UCC church community is located in New Canaan, CT, a beautiful New England village only one hour from New York City and 50 minutes from New Haven, CT. Please send your resume to The Congregational Church, 23 Park Street, New Canaan, CT 06840, ATTN: Kelly Morrissey - or by E-mail to [kelly@godsacre.org](mailto:kelly@godsacre.org).



## War Horse

Directed by Steven Spielberg

Starring Jeremy Irvine, Peter Mullan, David Thewlis, Tom Hiddleston, Benedict Cumberbatch and Emily Watson

**W**ar Horse is ideal material for Steven Spielberg. His adaptation of the children's novel by Michael Morpurgo comes to the screen by way of the celebrated National Theatre stage version, which has been entrancing audiences of all ages on Broadway since last season. It's the story of a magnificent auburn stallion named Joey, trained by a Devon farm boy, Albert Narracott, and then sold by his father to the army at the outset of World War I.

In the early scenes, the conflict is between Albert (Jeremy Irvine) and his father Ted (Peter Mullan), a drunk who hobbles about on a game leg, a souvenir from the Boer Wars. Ted buys Joey at auction with money he can ill afford to spend: his farm is failing, and his landlord, Lyons (David Thewlis), would rather drive him off the land than see him make a success of it. Ted purchases the horse to hold his own against Lyons, who bids spitefully against him. Ted needs Joey to work the farm so that he can produce a sufficient crop to stave off his landlord, and when the yield is insufficient he uses the opportunity of the war to get a decent price for the horse.

The sequence in which Albert gets Joey to pull the plow—after a rainfall drives Lyons and the neighbors, watching from the sidelines, away—is rousing. You wish, though, that Spielberg hadn't lingered quite so long on the struggles of the boy and the horse—and on Lyons's delight in jeering at Albert and his father—and that he hadn't overworked John Williams's fine, melodic score.



**ANTIWAR FABLE:** Devon farm boy Albert Narracott (Jeremy Irvine) trains the stallion Joey to serve in the British army at the outset of World War I.

Working with production designer Rick Carter and cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, Spielberg finds the visual splendor in these Devon scenes, then matches it when the movie shifts to the war front. At first Joey is in the charge of Captain Jim Nicholls (Tom Hiddleston), whose best friend (Benedict Cumberbatch) puts the horse in friendly competition with his horse, a tall black stallion named Topthorn that becomes Joey's close companion. They're indisputably the prize specimens of the unit. But after a battle Joey and Topthorn become German pack horses, though they get a respite when a young private goes AWOL with his 15-year-old brother and hides them both in a mill on a French farm. When a German unit appropriates the horses, the officer in charge explains brusquely, "The war takes everything."

*War Horse* is about what the war takes away and what, miraculously, survives. Spielberg handles the casualties of men and horses alike with gentle restraint—he's not out to remake *Saving Private Ryan*—but the images are remarkable: a horse buckling under the impossible physical demands placed on it, a young man vanishing in a white mist of poison gas, Joey frightened into a mesh of barbed wire by the first tank he's ever seen. This is an antiwar fable embedded in a fairy tale, and

it's often masterfully directed and very affecting.

## Like Crazy

Directed by Drake Doremus

Starring Anton Yelchin and Felicity Jones

*Like Crazy* is a love story about an American boy (Anton Yelchin) and an English girl (Felicity Jones) who meet in their final year of college in Los Angeles, fall in love and opt to spend the summer together in the States before she returns to London. But the fact that she violates the terms of her student visa to linger with him after graduation haunts them. When she tries to return as a tourist, she's turned away at the airport, and even after they marry in London the British embassy can't erase the black mark against her at the visa office.

The film is about how separation corrupts romance. It's sometimes poignant, and the director, Drake Doremus, has an instinct for subtle mood shifts and a real skill for working with actors. If only he were a better technician; he keeps relying on cinematic clichés. And if only he and Ben York Jones had written a real script—this one barely sketches in the characters and their on-again, off-again relationship.

*Reviewed by Steve Vineberg, who teaches at the College of the Holy Cross.*





## 2012 WASHINGTON ISLAND FORUM

with Sara Miles

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Sara Miles is the founder and director of the food pantry and director of ministry at Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She is the author of *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead* and *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*. She is a noted speaker, preacher and workshop leader nationally and her writing has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, and on National Public Radio.

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| <b>Forgiving</b>         | The hardest miracle, and the most difficult. Prayer, conflict, and the forgiveness of sin.                    |
| <b>Raising the Dead</b>  | How to bring new life out of the grave.   |

For more information and to register, go to [wichurches.org](http://wichurches.org) and look under “events.” Or call Wisconsin Council of Churches at (608) 837-3108.





by Rodney Clapp

# American SOUNDINGS

## Myopia of the market

Since the years of Reagan and Thatcher, we have heard a steady drumbeat about the limitations of government. In turn, the free market has been extolled for its supposedly boundless benefits. Perhaps it is time—or past time—that we recognize that the market has its limits.

This isn't to say that the free market is without strong advantages. As Adam Smith first articulated, the market works wonderfully in situations of strong supply and demand, with free exchange between the two. It increases productivity. It spurs competition that squeezes out waste. And it does all this by taking advantage of the self-interest

kingdom of God. This is an economy that functions not by supply and demand, but by grace. Prosperity gospels make the mistake of assuming on God, guaranteeing that if we give of our money to God, we will receive much more in return on our "investment."

Such false gospels distort the true gospel grievously, imagining not only that we can control God and God's responses, but that grace is a good we can earn or purchase from our own wherewithal. Prosperity gospels fall prey to a kind of capitalist heresy. So here is a realm in which the

each other on their way to save a burning home. Having a single public, governmental supplier makes more sense. Similarly, it makes no economic sense to build a proliferating series of private highways from one city to another. Better to concentrate on one or a few roads at the most.

In his book *The Price of Civilization*, Sachs points to another limitation on the market. Free markets fall short when producers "cause adverse spillovers to the rest of society, such as by polluting the rivers with toxic chemicals or emitting climate-changing

simply encourages the current consumption or even overconsumption of the earth's natural resources. It does not encourage sustainability and thus does not protect the interests of those who are not yet here to speak for themselves.

Only comparatively recently have we have recognized limits on the supply of fossil fuels and drinking water, as well as the vulnerability and limitations of the earth's atmospheric ozone layer. As Sachs observes, it is a matter of fairness to the future that we steward the earth's finite resources. "That's a tough role to play," he writes. "There is nothing natural or innate about it." We can't count on the market to naturally take account of future generations. "We need to defend the interests of those whom we've never met and never will. Yet those are our descendants and fellow humanity. Alas, it's a role that we've mostly ignored till now, to the increasing peril of all who will follow."

It is no insult to the free market to recognize its limits. These limits are theological as well as practical and material. To name them is to admit that the free market is good, but not the sole good. The market works best if it is complemented by church, government and other social agencies and not treated as an idol, the sole arbiter of the common good.

## The market does not factor in the choices or needs of future generations.

so ineradicable in human nature. Somehow the market's "invisible hand" moves to apportion the results of self-interest to the benefit of the common good. In these respects, the market works more efficiently and productively than any other system imagined or implemented.

So far, so good. The danger arises when people think the market works best for all the realms of our lives and when people fail to recognize that there are different economies, some of which do not operate best according to the rules of the market.

To take a premier example, consider the economy of the

free market does not work or belong—it has its limits.

The market has more immediate and practical limits as well. As economist Jeffrey Sachs notes, "Private markets work well when there are many suppliers and consumers, as is the case for goods and services such as clothing, furniture, automobiles, hotel services, restaurants, and the like. They begin to misfire when economic logic calls for a *single supplier*, for example, to operate the police force, fire department, army, court system, highway network, or electricity distribution system."

We don't want competing fire departments running into

carbon dioxide into the air." The market has no internal mechanisms to prevent abuses such as pollution. The free market in and of itself is simply too shortsighted to take account of what economists tellingly call "externalities." The market needs to be complemented by governmental regulation and levies that discourage harmful practices.

The market is shortsighted in another way: it includes only currently living consumers and producers. It does not take account of the citizens of the future, the generations not yet born. The market, unchecked,

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Rodney Clapp's *Soundings* column appears in every other issue.



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## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

University Congregational Church (UCC) in Wichita, KS, is seeking a PASTOR who understands that faith permits a variety of approaches in understanding the life and teachings of Jesus, appreciates the role of scholarship in thoughtful preaching and recognizes the importance of inclusiveness in the Christian message. Established in 1982, UCC has a dynamic congregation of 400 members who worship in a beautiful New England colonial-style church built in 1987. Outstanding preaching and excellent music are the cornerstones of the church. UCC has a modest endowment, no debt, and is located in a metropolitan area of 500,000 with three universities, excellent schools, outstanding health care and a wide variety of cultural opportunities. Salary and benefits for the position are highly competitive. Interested persons are invited to send a résumé and cover letter to: Search Committee, University Congregational Church, 9209 East 29th Street North, Wichita, KS 67226 or by e-mail to: [Cathy@ucchurch.org](mailto:Cathy@ucchurch.org). Additional information about the church may be found at: [www.ucchurch.org](http://www.ucchurch.org).

SENIOR PASTOR—River Terrace Church is an energetic, multigenerational, spiritually diverse Christian Reformed church, located on the edge of the Michigan State University campus. As a congregation we seek to cultivate hearts and minds to flourish in Christ. Responsibilities of the senior pastor include preaching, worship and leadership as pastor of the congregation and head of staff. More info at: [www.riverterrace.org](http://www.riverterrace.org). Send résumés and letters of interest by March 1, 2012, to: Search Committee, River Terrace Church, 1509 River Terrace Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823 or [search@riverterrace.org](mailto:search@riverterrace.org).



The Candler School of Theology of Emory University, in collaboration with the Graduate Division of Religion of Emory University and with the support of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., invites applications for a one-year POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH AND TEACHING FELLOWSHIP in practical theology and religious practices during the academic year 2012-13. Contact Ms. Brenda Roberts, Candler School of Theology, 1531 Dickey Drive, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322; phone (404) 727-2457; e-mail: [brenda.roberts2@emory.edu](mailto:brenda.roberts2@emory.edu); web information at: <http://candler.emory.edu/practices/>.



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COLLECTION OF ST. MATTHEW'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FORT WORTH, TEXAS. © 2009-2010 KAREN GJELTEN STONE

## Liturgical Year Banners, by Karen Gjelten Stone

Top row, left to right: *Christmas Banner*, *Daystar (Epiphany) Banner*, *Lent Banner*  
Bottom row, left to right: *Easter Banner*, *Pentecost Banner*, *Trinity/Ordinary Time Banner*

These six banners from St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, Texas, preview the Christian year. Gjelten Stone says, "I paint canvas with acrylic washes and add image transfer, drawing, and painting. I often cut and piece the canvas, and finish with more handwork and collage."

—Lois Huey-Heck



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